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BIRD NOTES





The Sidmouth Garden.

BIRD NOTES

BY THE LATE

JANE MARY HAYWARD

EDITED BY EMMA HUBBARD

WITH FIFTEEN ILLUSTRATIONS FROM DRAWINGS BY G. E. LODGE
AND FRONTISPIECE

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METEMPSYCHOSIS

OUT of the toil and trouble, out of the stream and
 strife,
To the bosom of Mother Nature I now commend
 my life ;
My torment and my treasure, I lay it down at her
 feet,
The shadow and the sunshine, the bitter and the
 sweet.
What will our Mother do with it? Whither away
 will she fly ?
Will she play with it on the wavelets, or follow
 the cloud through the sky ?
Will she fill the veins of the flowers, or dance
 with it on the breeze ?
Will it swell the storm on the mountain, or the
 murmur amidst the trees ?
Bury it not with the beetle, give it not to the
 grass,
Where the heavy ox and the ploughman may
 trample it as they pass ;
But, Mother—O Mother of wonders!—if ever a
 prayer may be heard,
Let my poor little life spring upwards and beat in
 the heart of a bird !

September 19, 1892.

INTRODUCTION

A FEW words of introduction to this little book are needed ; and they shall be but few, as neither the incidents of the author's life, nor her feelings towards publicity, would warrant more.

For many years I had asked my friend, Jane Mary Hayward, to collect and publish her notes on birds. I felt sure that the first-hand observations of so sympathetic and unwearied a watcher would have a value not to be measured by the limitations of their scope. She, however, always doubted whether they would have interest enough for any wider circle than that of the friends who cared for her, as well as for the birds and flowers that counted for so much in her life. Sometimes she was amused by the suggestion, and would perhaps answer it in her next letter by a passage like the

following :—‘ It is all very well to talk of “ pleasant fresh notes,” but it is only because I am setting them down for you, who I know will care to read them, that they are pleasant and fresh ; and if I went to set them down book-wise, they would be anything but that. I should see before me—we will say a great-grand-niece—with an antiquarian turn, fingering superciliously an old yellow manuscript, very badly written, and remarking, “ This was written by an ancient relative of mine ; an old maid who seems to have had nothing to do but to feed birds.” Seriously, there is no reason to suppose that anyone would be interested. The matter of anything I have to say—dealing, as it must deal, with individual birds, and not with birds in general—is so thin that it needs support.’

The first part, however, of these ‘ Bird Notes ’ is the result of her taking a rather more favourable view of the possibility of putting them into permanent form ; a result aided by getting a note-book wherein to enter them. In a letter written about the time of this acquisition, after telling me that her nuthatches (who were always rather a source of difficulty in her bird community) were getting tamer and more civilised, and that she

began to like them better now that they pecked less at the other birds, she says: 'Neither they nor the other birds ever do anything that can be recorded now that I have the note-book. However, I have written an introduction to the book that is (not) to be, in which I have set down all I remember of past bird-traits; and have also found a motto for the same, with which I am delighted. It is from Monckton Milnes' poems:

"The World is large; these things are small;
They may be nothing—but they are all."

Don't you think it would be very appropriate?'

'All' they certainly were not to her; though only those who knew her well could realise how much her life was enriched and cheered by the never-failing interest of her bird companionship.

She had originally meant to devote her life to the pursuit and practice of Art, and her father's endeavours to secure good teaching for her brought her into contact with Mulready, and afterwards, through the introduction of their old friend, Miss Mitford, of 'Our Village,' with Haydon the painter. In some retrospective notes written in 1873 Miss Hayward says: 'We visited poor

Haydon in his studio a few years before his death by his own hand. He was wild in his manner then, and must certainly have been quite out of his mind when he penned the strange advertisements which appeared in the "Athenæum" and other papers just before the sad event.

'At the time we visited him he was painting David fighting the Lion, and his studio was strewn with the anatomical drawings that he had been making from the dissected body of a lion that had died in the Zoological Gardens. He had also just painted a large angel's head in fresco on the wall of his room. Fresco was then about to be reintroduced, as it was thought, and he was full of enthusiasm about it. Very much excited too! He had wounded himself just before by rushing against the point of a bayonet whilst painting a large picture of the Maid of Saragossa. He received us very kindly, and I was terribly shocked and grieved when I heard of his sad death.'

From this same book of retrospective notes I extract the following passage as showing something of the temper of mind of her early days, and as throwing light on the character of the verses that will be found among the Notes.

I believe I have always loved literature and knowledge more than Art, though I had longed to be a painter ever since reading Cunningham's "Life of Blake." How well I remember standing in the old shrubbery one bright warm summer morning, arresting myself under a Portugal laurel in a state of the wildest excitement, and panting, partly from the speed with which I had rushed there from the schoolroom where I had been reading, and partly with intense longing to paint, paint, paint—not anything visible in heaven or earth, but my fancies, as Blake did! I think it was reading that life that made me a painter.

‘Well do I remember, too, the delight of reading some of Scott’s works, and also his *Life*, under that same old Portugal laurel that I called my “Castle” in the days when we each had a tree-castle, from the top of which our flags floated. When I had finished Scott’s *Life*, I put up a chalk monument to him under one of the fir-trees. I did it quite seriously, from a deep feeling of affection and reverence. And I did it *secretly*; that was characteristic. Any expression of emotion I was always curiously careful to conceal. For this reason I buried more than one early

“poem” under the fir-trees, or behind the root house in the shrubbery—such was my horror and fear lest they should be seen. But I may as well

“let fall

The curtain of Oblivion o’er them all,”

as I said in some of those juvenile verses, which I unfortunately buried where I could never find them again, though they were enclosed for safety in a tin pea-shooter!

‘The dear old shrubbery! As I look back, that old shrubbery seems to me to be the very kernel of my much-loved home. At one time I almost lived in it, never walking beyond it, except, on Sundays, to church. Its shades and silences, its gleams and voices—now the murmur of the wind in the tall Scotch firs, now the song of the many birds all unconscious of my still presence—these nourished the poetry of my life and taught me to love solitude and meditation. I sat there—knelt there—again lately, under the old laurel, on the sloping green-sward, when on a visit to the old home which is no more mine. “Not mine now!”—it was a sad thought. But as I sat and watched the gleams of sunshine on the now green and

seldom-trodden paths, the conviction came to me that it was mine still, mine only ; that it was to me what it never could be to any other ; that its influence had become part of my life ; that its heart was mine, and undiscoverable by any other. So I took possession again, and enjoyed the hour.'

To return to the 'Bird Notes.' They may be thought in some degree to suffer from the lack of any systematic plan that should connect and arrange them in a more or less definite order : yet this was never their aim, and their freedom and freshness must have been dulled if they had been written under the impression that they were to be submitted to a possible circle of unknown readers. They are a series of small sketches from the life, jotted down by the writer at the moment when the sight or sound was vividly present to her senses ; senses quickened by hereditary aptitude, by artistic training, and above all by that loving sympathy which is the condition of true insight.

Another objection too lies on the surface, and an easy smile might be raised by the frank 'anthropomorphism' of many of the notes ; yet

the smile would be misplaced, and perhaps on this head also more is gained than lost. Mr. Philip Hamerton remarks: 'The main difficulty in conceiving the mental states of animals is that the moment we think of them as *human* we are lost.' But there is a deeper insight in Mr. Lloyd Morgan's retort: '*Yes; but the pity of it is that we cannot think of them in any other terms than those of human consciousness.*' The only world of constructs that we know is the world constructed by man.' And it is just that 'reflex of a human face' always recognised by Miss Hayward in her favourites, that gives the clue and the interest to her account of their doings.

This fellowship with the birds lasted the whole of her life, and in her latest note to me, dated January 8, 1894—not a fortnight before her death—she says, 'L. has been in; also a robin, formally introduced by Mrs. Halse' (her Devonshire servant) 'with, "Come along! here's your Missus."'

The confidence of the birds as they waited on her window-sill, and watched their small 'Missus,' and clamoured for and enjoyed her gentle hospitality, was most remarkable: I never saw anything like it.

Her garden was not only a source of delight to her, as long as she could work or even walk in it, but it supplied her with subjects for her brush, and her friends with many flowers and choice old-fashioned plants. Botany, with its questions of adaptation, of connection, of reversion, of protective defence, was always of interest to her; and it was to her that friends often turned for information or suggestion in solving any botanical difficulty. In this, as in other subjects, it was not the accumulation of isolated facts that attracted her so much as the large schemes of thought into which the facts fitted—the lines of theory on which they could be threaded in orderly sequence.

The verses are chosen from a large number in my possession; they show but another branch of that deep-rooted love of the beauty of the world about her which was to her a tree of life.

Although the intention of making painting the main occupation of her life was to a great extent frustrated by ill-health, she still accomplished a good deal. Her brush was always at the service of her friends, and she was often very successful in giving the character of the head she was painting. In 1853 she had no less than six

pictures hanging on the walls of the Royal Academy. One of her best portraits was that in oils of Professor F. D. Maurice, now in the National Portrait Gallery. To those of us who are old enough to recollect his preaching in Lincoln's Inn Chapel, this portrait forcibly recalls the pathetic, yearning expression of that noble head.

In many directions Miss Hayward was a woman of no common powers. She was a good linguist; as a child keeping a diary in Italian, and when she went from Wokingham in 1852 to live in London, helping a friend who had started a school for hurdy-gurdy boys, among whom many dialects of Italian had to be spoken as well as understood. At Sidmouth, besides amusing herself with many translations from German poets, she was chosen as critic and judge by a small Translation Society. And to help her understanding of the New Testament, she studied Greek.

But greater than her gifts in any special branch of art or literature was her power of helping both head and heart of all those who enjoyed the happiness of her friendship. The right book would be given, the needful tools for carving or

modelling or painting would be found, the wise suggestion would be ready, and the unstinted wealth of loving sympathy would abound for the many whom she loved. Her cares and anxieties were so little concerned with self that in her later years she was able with truth to write, 'All my storms now are on other people's seas.'

Jane Mary Hayward was born at Wokingham January 26, 1825; and died at Sidmouth January 20, 1894.

EMMA HUBBARD.

THE VOICE OF AUTUMN

I SAID unto the Ocean, 'Speak thou for me, O Sea!
O restless, craving creature, thy voice shall speak for
me!

Upon thy wind-lashed waters lift up my spirit's cry,
And bear it to the mighty cloud that sails along the
sky!'

But now, O voice of Autumn, that sigh'st amidst the
trees,

'Tis thee I bid to speak for me and bear upon thy
breeze

To all I love a long farewell,
A greeting, and a passing bell.

O gentle voice of Autumn, there is little else to say;
My heart-beats old are well-nigh told, and I—I pass
away.

Hope folded long ago her wings, and all desires are
dead;

I only seek a resting-place for weary heart and head.
Yet speak for me a soft farewell to Nature's lovely face,
And cover with thy golden leaves my last long sleeping-
place.

To all I love, a long farewell,
A greeting, and a passing bell.

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BIRD NOTES



CHAPTER I

Sidmouth, Devon.

I LIVE alone, surrounded by fields and trees ; and the one large window of my quiet sitting-room looks across the top of a verandah on to a lawn and flower-beds full of roses, and full, therefore, of the aphides that birds love so well. An unfrequented road lies beyond that ; then a row of fine lime-trees and elms, a meadow, and a river. A Devonshire stream it is, that comes and goes in its red, rocky bed, with storm and sunshine ; sometimes thundering noisily over the weir ; sometimes murmuring dreamily amongst the flints that are brought down by freshets from the hills above ; and sometimes, here and there, hiding almost out of sight. A few days are sufficient to make the difference.

The graceful yellow wagtail loves our river, and the splendid grey one is often to be seen there. Both in summer and winter they haunt and

beautify it, and a delightful sight it is to see them chasing one another, or their shadows, from rock to rock, or playing with the water as they splash it all about them. The piebald one also abounds here, but it does not seem to care so much for the river; it seems to prefer the roads and fields and even the house-tops. I have had one now and then upon my window-sill.

One day in autumn, some years ago, there was a curious sight: my lawn, and also the small lawns on either side, were covered with wagtails of all the three kinds, the piebald being, naturally, the most numerous. I never saw them collected in a flock before; is it their custom? and were they preparing for migration? If so, I suppose the wagtails that we have here in the winter come to us from more northern countries. Flocks of larks and starlings have visited us in the same way when there has been much snow; yet we have both birds with us during the winter as well as the summer. The larks, however, do not come down into the valley under ordinary circumstances. To hear *them* one must climb to the top of Salcombe Hill, which is 497 feet high, and very steep; there they abound; and there, too, may be heard the kitten-like cry of the plover. No; when these poor larks visit us in such numbers, it is from a sad necessity; the snow lies thick above

the frozen ground, and they are starving. Not a blade of grass, not a green leaf of any description that happens to be uncovered do they leave behind them. It is a bad time for young plants of the cabbage kind if they raise their heads at all above the snow. Some of the larks probably cross the Channel, or go west; but they are very weak, and a large number fall a prey to hunger or the gun.

It is the same with the flocks of starlings; they only make their appearance when quite starved out. A piteous sight it is to see them hammering desperately upon the iron earth—all the more piteous because one cannot help them at all. If food is placed before them they pay no attention to it, but go on pecking the earth; or perhaps they try to fly a little further—not far though, they have not the strength. One snowy winter, a few years ago, hundreds of them were lying about dead in the fields, while others fell down the chimneys into our rooms. Yet the starling is a clever bird—a clever imitator, at all events.

There are some fine trees along the reach of the river, just above the weir opposite to the house; for the meadow on this side was once part of the garden of Salcombe House, and is still called 'The Lawn.' These trees are often full of small birds: golden-crested wrens, and sometimes goldfinches. More frequently there are tits of all

kinds, chiffchaffs, and whitethroats ; while plenty of wrens and occasional coots haunt the bushes below them. Sometimes a heron alights on the marshy ground, through which a small rivulet makes its way to the river ; sometimes a raven flaps about in the boughs of the trees on the other side ; but the yellow wagtail is there the constant and never-failing delight.

Once, and once only, I started a blue kingfisher, a pleasure I shall never forget. But that was much higher up the river and in a much wilder part ; it was far from any road or even path, and at the upper end of the reach, overhung with trees and bushes. I was searching the beds of flint in the shallow water for a rare flower that I had once found there, when the lovely creature rose not many yards from me and flew straight away up the stream, with a *slow and heavy* flight, as if it really was a weight of jewels that flashed upon its splendid back. I saw it alight on a bough hanging over the water, and followed it up as well as I could ; but the roughness of the way obliged me to take my eye off it, and I lost it again. Again I put it up further on, but I never saw it so close and well as I could have wished.

Green woodpeckers are by no means rare birds here. Strange and handsome creatures ! I watched three feeding on my lawn one morning

in the small hours before the world was awake. Birds have it all to themselves at that time, or, at all events, they seem to think so; and so they exhibit themselves and their manners and customs with a delightful confidence. I had never seen the green woodpecker before, and it was the sound of a strange cry in the garden that aroused me and made me go to the window. I was quite



GREEN WOODPECKERS

startled when I saw these three large strange-looking birds plunging their bills into the ants' nests, keeping them there a moment or two, then withdrawing them with an air of satisfaction, and again plunging them into the treasure-heap in such a regular and business-like fashion; but I know their form and fashions well now, for they often pay my ants' nests a visit in the daytime, when

the day is wet and everything is more than usually quiet.

Owls abound here also, and much do I love to hear their weird cry at nights when the first frosts come; but I have never had the good fortune to see one. A servant of mine, not remarkably truthful, I must admit, once told me that she had seen a row of small ones sitting on the garden wall when she opened the kitchen door one night. And once, when I was watching from dark to sunrise at an upper window, looking east, I saw what may have been an owl flitting away into the shades, just as things of light were beginning to arouse themselves.

There is a little grove of tall trees just within sight of my windows, and beyond 'The Lawn.' The river flows and sings over a shallow bed of flints most musically there, below the bank on which the trees stand, and on the opposite side are meadows and hedges. That is a capital place for watching birds. I have seen a flock of the large blackheaded tit there, but only once; I do not think they flock together much. A handsome bird it is, but not graceful or interesting.

The reach of the river opposite these houses is, I think, the prettiest; but there are other tree-bordered nooks and curves with pleasant meadow banks. How long, I wonder, will there be any-

thing of the kind? Year after year there is less; I see it vanishing before my eyes. Directly the banks want repairing, trees are felled upon them, and laid beneath them to mend them. Why cannot trees be brought from some other place where they will not be missed? It may save trouble and expense for the moment to utilise these growing on the spot; but it is shortsighted, for, setting aside the loss of beauty, which the offenders are unable to appreciate, the roots of growing trees are the only things that can resist the rush of water. The dead ones laid under the bank are quickly destroyed and washed away.

And the curves of the river! Almost every year some tasteless riparian owner cuts straight some of its beautiful curves. Where is the lovely silver serpent that glided amongst the hills when I first came here? It is becoming something between a ditch and a canal for the greater part of its course as one sees it from the hills. Surely the natural beauty of a country is a valuable public property, one that ought to be guarded by the law, even at the expense of the landed proprietors, large or small. If the large landed proprietors will not be at the expense, nor take the trouble to preserve the beauty of their native country, which is, as it were, committed to their careless hands, their *raison d'être* ceases.

No doubt a fickle, riotous stream like this is difficult to keep in order ; sometimes it tears down its own trees, but that is no reason why we should make matters worse instead of better.

Riotous it is indeed at times, and furious, and cruel ! Three persons have been drowned in it since I came here. It was quiet when a poor old woman, nearly blind, walked into it in broad daylight, and was drowned, though there were houses near. It was a broad, boiling, devastating, storm-lashed torrent when a poor boy was blown off a foot-bridge into it before his father's face, and carried down so swiftly that rescue was impossible. That same night a poor woman, half mad, who lived in a cottage near it, was left for a few minutes by the son and husband who had been told to watch, and who only left the house to secure something threatened by the wind, and away was she—out into the storm and darkness, and into the boiling rushing flood and the darker gulf of eternity ! No doubt the nerve-storm was at its height in her poor frame also. I have known such coincidences before.

Those who study the connection between storms in the sun and magnetic storms, the aurora borealis and allied phenomena, would do well to take the nerve-storms into consideration also. I am persuaded that they are closely connected, and that much might be learnt from the connection.

THE RIVER

O! the green pellucid river,
Where the sunbeams dance and quiver;
Dance and quiver, fling and float,
Merrily to the blackbird's note!

O! the green pellucid river,
Where the sunbeams shake and shiver;
Shake and shiver, shrink and fly
From a thing that there doth lie—

From a thing that lieth there,
Pond-weed tangled in its hair;
Helpless hands washed to and fro,
As the careless currents flow.

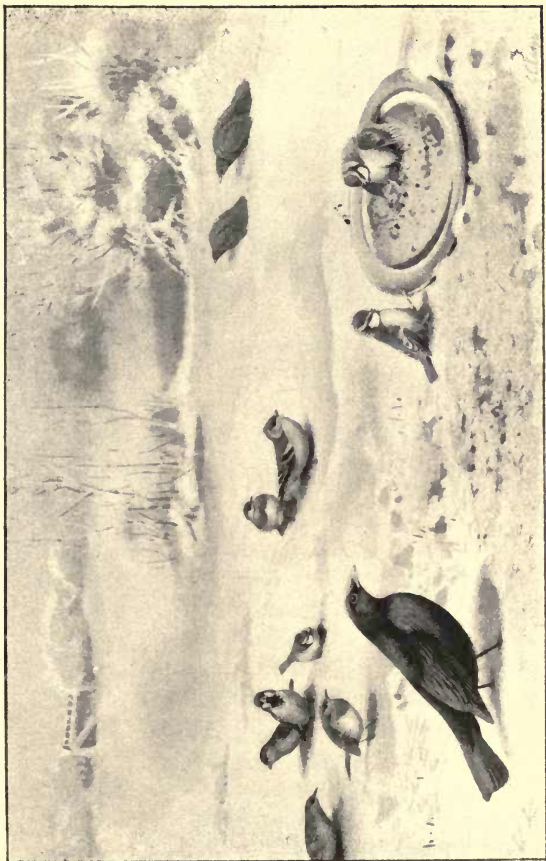
From the fixed and stony eye
Duck and dipper frightened fly;
Whilst the river as it flows
Hoarsely whispers what it knows—

What it knows and what doth keep
In its hollows dark and deep;
Whilst, above, the sunbeams quiver
On the smoothly smiling river.

CHAPTER II

MORE than fifteen years have passed away since I first began to provide a morning meal at my window for the birds ; and I have derived a large amount of amusement and interest from the practice, and also not a little instruction. One of the first things that I learnt was the great resemblance between birds and children ; and the discovery has been of great use in dealing with them. No doubt we are all of a piece, their little wills and ways are the result of balanced instinct ; the same instincts, and as nicely balanced, as those of babies. A little more hunger, a little less fear ; a little less hunger, a little more fear : up and down goes the balance with unerring regularity, modified only by the state of the weather and the different characters of the different species of birds.

The action of a blue tit spreading its wings over a nice little heap of crumbs that it wishes to keep all to itself, scolding all the while at any other bird that attempts to approach, is so like that of a covetous and angry child spreading its



WINTER TIME

little fat arms over its toys that one can but laugh at it. One ought perhaps rather to sigh than to laugh to find so many unpleasant human qualities in such pretty little beings ; but I love my birds, and laugh at them. *My* birds. I do not exactly know what right I have to call them *my* birds ; my property in them is slight if any. But I do not wish for more. I would not have a bird in a cage for the world : it would be a perpetual torture to me until I let it out. I do not even wish to tame them ; I have a dread of their becoming too tame, lest it should make them careless of danger. I wonder what became of the dear little robin that followed me about in the garden last autumn, and came at my call, and even, once, took crumbs from my hand ? I did not tame it ; it presented itself at my feet one day, quite tame ; and immediately accepted the situation of under-gardener, sure to be at hand if I began to stir the earth, or turn out a plant from a flower-pot, and ready to relieve me of any unfortunate worm or insect that came to the surface. And O how quick it was to see them ! I turned round one day to see why the bird had suddenly hopped away from me, and behold ! it had a large spider in its mouth, struggling and kicking. And it forthwith swallowed the same, struggles and all. It was a large spider, but the bird must have had wonderful eyes

to see it so far off as it did. I really believe that that little robin—a young one, I think—loved *me* as well as my crumbs. It always came to meet me when I went into the garden if it was there, or came to my call if it was in the next garden. But one day I called in vain. Only the day before it had hopped up to me in the most lively and affectionate manner; but that day, and every day after, I called in vain! It was a sad business. What became of it? Was it cat or dog or trap that deprived me of my pet? Or was it the jealousy of some older and stronger robin? I am inclined to think that the latter was the cause; and that an older and bolder robin (bolder towards birds, not towards me), that appeared in the garden about that time may have chased the tame one away. I am the more inclined to think this, first, because the tame one was very much afraid of other robins, and immediately sought the shelter of a bush if it heard the note of one in the distance, and also because the same thing happened once before, some years ago. In that case also the robin presented itself at my feet one day without any invitation on my part, and it seemed to me that it was aiming at the shelter of my dark brown dress. It was a very timid bird, and seemed seldom to leave the shelter of a bush except to come to me. A frightened creature

naturally seeks the protection of something of like colour to itself : a blue tit flies to the top of a tree, to the green leaves and blue sky—so does the nuthatch ; a robin seeks the brown shade of a bush or laurel—so does a blackbird. Of this I am sure, as I have had abundant opportunities of observing it at my window ; and so I cannot help thinking that this young robin may well have felt some comfort and security in the proximity of my dark red-brown dress. But alas ! it was a false security ; for one day, when it was at my very feet, an angry and jealous robin, after scolding it violently from the top of a wall, dashed down upon the poor little thing in the most savage manner ; and, after a flying fight in the air which I was helpless to prevent, drove it away. I saw it two or three times afterwards ; but it soon left.

It is a mystery to me why some robins should be so strangely tame and some so savage. Is it perhaps against robin-law that a member of the community should seek human fellowship and crumbs ? Is it that the hen robin has an ear but no voice, and is attracted by the human voice, as it is by that of its own kind ? Or is it that the younger birds have to be taught to be afraid of danger, and that the savage attack of the older robin was merely a severe lesson ? Whether

taught or not, they certainly learn it from the older birds; the fear does not come altogether naturally to them: I have had many proofs of this. Two young chaffinches were almost brought up upon my window-sill last spring. They underwent a regular course of instruction in the art of eating, and most amusing it was to watch it. At first not a crumb was taken without the assistance of a parent bird; gradually they were left a little more, and when the pinch of hunger was strong they would try to peek up a little for themselves, crying all the time. Directly the parents came back their helplessness also returned, and the large mouths gaped and the wings drooped entreatingly. A most voracious bird was one of them—the son and heir, and such a little Turk! He would not suffer any bird not of the family to come upon the window-sill while he was there. It was absurd to see how birds much more powerful than himself retreated before the open-mouthed attack of the courageous young thing that could not yet feed itself. I noticed that though the parents flew away when I went too close to the window, the young ones at first merely looked round in astonishment, and then began to peck about for the crumbs. After a time they also flew away if I went too near.

I noticed the same thing when some long-

tailed tits visited me one winter. They had no idea of being afraid of anything on the other side of the window: possibly they could not see me. I think the smaller birds have great difficulty in seeing through a window. I could put my head quite close to them without frightening them. But they noticed the fear of the other birds, and after some time—some weeks—followed their example and flew away too.

The robin seems to see further into a room than any other bird (it sees me as I sit by the fire), but with that exception the rule seems to be that the larger the bird—the larger its head, that is—the more easily it sees me through the window. The cole tit seems to see further than the blue tit; but then, though its body is smaller, its head and eye are, I think, rather larger. The blue tit does not see far, and it usually refuses to be alarmed until it really does see for itself the cause of the sudden flight of the other birds. A very funny thing it is to see a blue tit stand on end, as it were, and peer over into the room on tiptoe, drawn out to its thinnest and longest, and then, either not seeing me or thinking that I am not dangerous, settle down comfortably into a little round ball in the midst of the crumbs, only too glad to get them all to itself. Very greedy and very courageous is the blue tit; plebeian and ungraceful in manner, but of all birds

the most comical and amusing. It is by far the most common bird on my window-sill during the winter, but in the summer it goes further afield. I had, however, once a curious proof that it does not lose sight of its winter resources, and that it retains a certain sense of property in them. It was thus. One day in September I was standing at the window, which was closed, when to my great satisfaction I saw a long-tailed tit in the garden below, a bird I had not seen for a long time. I saw it come nearer and nearer until it alighted upon a rose-branch that rises above the top of the verandah, and forms a pretty and convenient perch. But just as I was hoping that it might come a little nearer, and alight upon the window-sill, down came two blue tits upon it and began bustling about and pecking away at the bare stone just as if it had been covered with crumbs. Now there were not only no crumbs there, but there had not been any for many months, and there could be no other possible interpretation of this curious little scene than that these were two old *habitués* come to claim their own feeding-place to the exclusion of long-tailed tits and all other invaders, and the sense of property was so strong in them that they took not the slightest notice of my presence close to the window, of which they must have been aware.

The long-tailed one allowed the claim and gracefully flew away, to my great regret.

There appears to be a great antagonism between these two species of tit. I saw one day what seemed to be a pitched battle going on between two little armies of them in some larches, of which tree there is a small wood further up the river. In that case the blue tits were driven off, or at all events they took to flight *en masse*, and left the others in possession. But O the chattering and fluttering there was about it!

Most birds seem to be afraid of the sharp bills and the resolution of the blue tit. I have seen robins, sparrows, chaffinches, and even the nut-hatch fly before it. A very spirited little bird is the graceful long-tailed tit (‘bottle-tits,’ as we called them in Berkshire, from the form of their exquisite nest), very lovely, and withal aristocratic-looking; the blue tit looks extremely plebeian beside it. Alas, since the bitter winter of three or four years ago, I have seen but few of them. The golden-crested wren too has become very scarce since then. The long-tailed tits are not birds that frequent the neighbourhood of houses much, but flocks of them—families, I should say, of ten or twelve—used formerly to pass through my garden now and then, lingering and fluting among the trees.

Once, soon after I came here, when this house was surrounded by old orchards and fields and hedges, I had a great treat. The winter was severe and thick snow covered both the ground and the trees. Besides strewing crumbs on the window-sill above, I had placed some on a flower-stand under the verandah below, just before the dining-room window. I was sitting in the drawing-room above when a flute-like note drew me to the window, and I saw in the garden below a bird that was strange to me. I went downstairs to get a nearer view of it, and to my great delight found about a dozen lovely little long-tailed tits feeding upon the flower-stand! They took complete possession that winter not only of the flower-stand but of the window-sill above. They would wait in the morning in the trees opposite (I could hear their clear, flute-like notes as I was getting up), and as soon as I closed the window after putting out the crumbs for them, down they would fly with an undulating motion, like a flight of arrows, straight to me. I almost felt as if I were going to be shot, but apparently they did not see me at all behind the glass, and would begin to feed at once. Most lovely little things they were, with such graceful, high-bred manners. Very sociable too; if one of them happened to come alone at any time (and they came and went all

day long), it would not eat till it had piped up a companion to eat with it. In order to accommodate so many long tails in so confined a space, they would stick them almost straight up into the air to be out of each other's way. One evening, I remember, when it was getting dark, a little thing came alone and piped for a long time without being able to make any of its companions hear. It took no notice of me, though I put my face close to it. At last I began to think it would stay all night, and was wishing I could open the window without alarming it, and take it in, when all in a moment it was gone; I suppose it at last heard a voice in the distance answering it. I believe they sleep closely clustered together on a bough side by side, and probably could not sleep otherwise. No doubt union is warmth to them, if not strength. Perhaps it is strength too; though so small, they never seem afraid when all together. Very gentle birds they are, but I did once see one defy a blue tit, and very pretty its anger was. The blue tits, though they had not at that time made themselves so much at home as they did afterwards, were not at all kind to them. I was obliged sometimes to play the policeman among them, and to protect the delicate little long-tailed tits from the others. This I was able to do because the blue tits could see me when the others

could not ; so, if I heard any quarrelling going on, I went near enough to the window for the blue tits to see a warning finger held up to them, when they speedily dispersed, leaving the longtails wondering but happy. They remained in the neighbourhood till late in the spring, and indeed in the summer I once caught sight of one on the sill as I came into the room ; the window was open, and it saw me, and vanished in a moment, though not before I had seen that it had a new light summer dress on.

The one bird that never altogether leaves me is the chaffinch. It is coarse and plebeian in appearance and voice and manner (it appears to me to have a 'cerebral r' in its voice) ; it eats even more than the sparrow, and drives away the other birds if it can ; but its extreme tameness is taking, and there is a great deal of beautiful colour about it. The soft browns of the hen bird please me more than the bolder tints of the cock, and I think she is the tamer of the two. One old hen chaffinch was incessantly here all last spring and summer. I seldom put any crumbs out, but she came all the same, and did not move though I put my face close to the window. One day we had this little conversation in the words of Browning : " ' What, and is it really you again ? ' quoth I. ' I again ? what else did you expect ? ' quoth she." She said

it plainly to my eye, with the little impertinent head well thrown back and all on one side, and looking straight at me. I laughed, but she did not go. No, they are not interesting birds, but it is an advantage that you can distinguish the cock and hen, and also, to some extent, the old and young ; and I cannot forget the confiding way in which that old lady and her husband brought their son and daughter to be fed and taught to feed upon my window-sill last spring.

The nuthatch is a very amusing bird, with a great deal of character, as one would imagine it likely to have, with its curious figure, and its fine large dark inquiring eyes. They do not come every winter, but this winter they have been very constant visitors in the morning. Though they take it, they do not seem to care much for bread ; but I put out scraps of bacon after breakfast, and then there is 'immense excitement among them : they dare anything and everything for it, sending all the other birds to the right about, and looking me boldly in the face. One—there are only two that come, I think—seems rather afraid of the other, and is rather smaller, and not quite so bold. I have however seen them, with lance in rest, ready to fly at each other. Their appetite for bacon seems to be unappeasable ; they pack their large beaks full, and bustle off with it, and are

back again for more in an incredibly short space of time. I believe they store it.

The little cole tit timidly bides its time upon a rose-branch, and when the nuthatch goes, up it comes for a little bit, snaps it up nervously and is away with it at once. Those who stay to feed do it circumspectly, they are so afraid of the long sharp beak of the nuthatch. It is difficult to frighten a nuthatch : if I am too close it will hang on for a moment with its claws to the edge of the sill, and look sagely at me as if to ask leave. It swings its long beak and large head to and fro all the time, as if it wished to examine circumstances on all sides, and, if possible, to see behind my head ; then, seizing three or four large pieces at once, away it goes. But though tame and amusing, there is something in its flat figure and sprawling legs that I dislike ; it is almost reptilian. I am afraid too that it is a cruel bird and dangerous to the others, judging by the savage stabs with which it sometimes attacks them, and their fear of it. I think I must lay to its charge the untimely death of a poor little chaffinch that I found dead below the window-sill one day, with a hole in its skull. I know that the nuthatch had been feeding and fighting there in the morning whilst I painted behind my curtain ; and I heard once a shrill cry, and a flap of feathers against the window. When

I looked out there was nothing to be seen ; but there was death below—a murder had been committed !

That is not the only tragic occurrence I have witnessed here. One day—a day of frost and deep snow—I found a little blue tit on the verandah, dead, and almost buried in the snow. I drew it up, hoping that life might not be quite extinct ; but I could not restore it. Sometimes birds have come with broken or dangling legs, or with only one—a sad sight that ! One came thus for two years, but generally such a disadvantage in the struggle for life must tend to bring it to a speedy conclusion. A one-legged robin came at one time, but not for long. An old hedge-sparrow lived for many years in the garden with its head quite bare of feathers, and apparently very feeble on the wing. It was a sweet singer and very tame, but it never came to my window. When I last saw it, it was lying on its side on the lawn in a sunny spot, lifting up its wing to expose its old side to the comfort of the sunshine. A simple gentle bird is the hedge-sparrow, and very tame sometimes ; and its song, though weak and wiry compared with some, is very pleasant ; it is so peaceful. Besides, it sings on when all other birds are silenced except the robin.

‘ Except the robin.’ How often one has to say

that ; what a very exceptional bird it is in many ways, and how much more our own ! He has a property in us too, at all events in our gardens and homes. And he knows it : a full-grown robin seems to have a quite singular sense of property in a garden ; he will not, if he can prevent it, allow any other robin to come into the particular enclosure that he considers his own. He also objects to *unusual* birds of other kinds. I have often been called to the window by the excited warning note of the robin, and have found, sometimes indeed a cat, but more often an invasion of unusual birds of a more or less interesting kind—a flock of chiffchaffs, a passing company of long-tailed tits or golden-crested wrens, or a goldfinch or even a greenfinch ; for the latter seldom comes here, or the yellowhammer either, though both I think are common on the hills and higher up the valley. Even the marsh tit is sufficiently a stranger to excite the indignant jealousy of the robin.

Greenfinches were frequently here in the autumn at one time ; but that was when I had a tall and widely spreading sweet-briar in the middle of the kitchen garden. The abundant fruit of this tree attracted them, and very handsome they looked—quite splendid indeed—poised on the long arched and swinging branches covered with scarlet hips.

Once only have I seen a bullfinch here, and that did not come to the window. Neither do the wrens come, though there are plenty about ; twice only have I seen one for a minute on my window-sill. Goldfinches never come to the window, but I used to see them frequently at one time, and



BULLFINCH

once a pair took it into their gay little heads to build in a sycamore close by. I saw those birds once more, only once. I caught sight of them one day flying about a yellow honey-suckle on the wall near their old home, and they seemed about to build in it : this they very wisely did not do.

After all it is as perilous to place one's love too low as too high. I was grieved to lose those goldfinches.

A chaffinch too in my garden has apparently had the same object, that of protection by means of colour, in view. Its nest, in a juniper, is made of bright moss, exactly the tint of the young shoots of the tree. This, I am sorry to say, appears to have been abandoned. There were several eggs in it, which were quite cold when I found it.

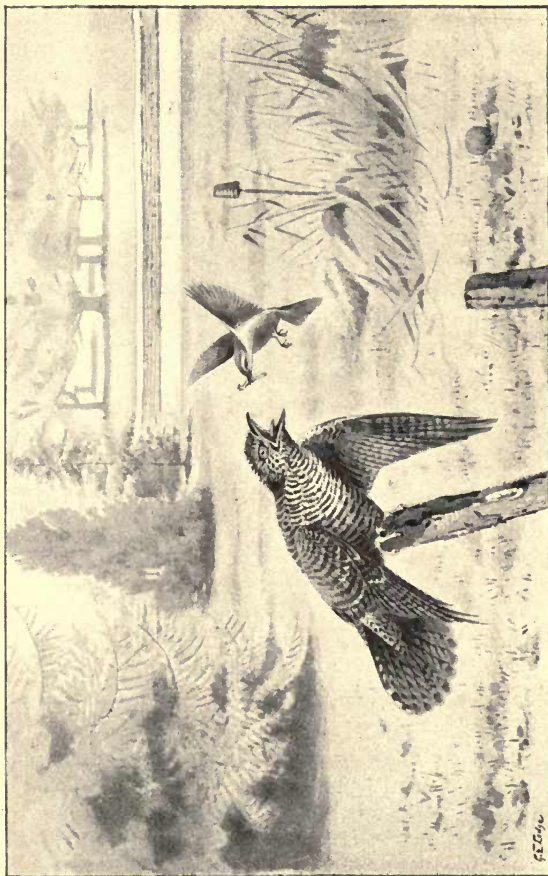
Besides protective colouring there are two other qualities that recommend certain materials to nest-builders, viz. flexibility and length. Everyone must have noticed how sparrows and other birds will steal pieces of string or thread, or anything long and limp, when they are building. Only the other day I caught a sparrow trying hard to untie a piece of thick string by which the branch of a tree had just been tied back; it would have succeeded if I had not come to the rescue. I have had the ties of budded roses taken away by them also. I have seen forget-me-not, alyssum, laburnum, and clematis, all long and limp sprays, made use of. Rooks too are fond of young branches of weeping willow. But there can be no doubt that birds have a very keen sense of the protectiveness of colour; if a blue tit is startled, it is sure to take refuge in a high branch against

the sky—blue and brown and green. A robin flits away to the brown shadow of a bush. A thrush, as soon as it is born, is wonderfully clever in finding its own tints on some wall or tree-trunk. It makes believe to be a piece of this to such an extent that one may approach quite close to it, and it will remain absolutely motionless, so long as one's eye is upon it. If the eye is removed, even for a 'twinkling,' the bird will have disappeared silently behind something before one can look again.

A pair of sparrows in the garden some time ago showed much ingenuity and perseverance. They began a nest in a *Pyrus japonica* against this white house. I removed it, not wishing for the noise and dirt so near the window ; they began again, and again I had it removed. This time, although it was apparently little more than a flat beginning, there were eggs upon it, so I suppose they had made it as small as they could, to avoid observation. They tried again, and on removing it the third time I found that the birds were overlaying it with the white flowers of some sweet alyssum growing below, as if from a wish to render it less conspicuous against the white house. The flowers were quite fresh and numerous. After this they made two more trials—five in all—and the last time the attempted nest was

almost entirely made of white alyssum. I got a dreadful scolding whenever I went near the place, but after the fifth attempt they gave it up. Last year they tried the same thing, and I removed two nests; I however allowed a thrush that had built below to remain, and bring up its brood there. After the thrushes were gone, the sparrows immediately built on the top of the forsaken thrush's nest! They seem to have drawn the conclusion, rather too hastily but not irrationally, that that must be a safe place for them. I do not know that their thoughts took the shape of words, but they chattered over it immensely, and I do not know where the line can be drawn between words and exclamations, nor between those and the cries of birds, which are more varied and numerous and distinctive in purpose than is generally imagined.

It may be said that there is no progress nor addition to the language of birds; but I am not sure of this. Last winter a robin, accustomed to be fed on my window-sill with bits of bacon, invented a note by which it called me to the window to feed it. It was a quite peculiar note, hushed, muttered, short; the object seemed to be to reach my ear and not that of rival birds. I always found it waiting for the opening of the window and putting out of the food; it would



CHIFFCHAFF FEELING YOUNG CUCKOO

then take a very few little bits, look gratefully into my face, and fly away till it was hungry again, then *da capo*. The same robin hops in and out now continually through the open window, and takes what it pleases.

I saw a strange sight lately in the garden of the next house from an upper window of my own. A young cuckoo had alighted on the top of a stake, and was loudly and hoarsely crying for food. The other birds seemed to be all flying away from it in alarm; but suddenly a very small one, a chiff-chaff I think, flew straight to the cuckoo, and after fluttering about its head like a moth, popped something into its mouth, and then flew away for more. The cuckoo looked large enough to swallow its foster-parent, and was strong on the wing, and apparently full-grown.

I have been watching the soaring of the martins, who seem to be obliged to attain a certain height before they can cross the Channel. During the late prevalence of north-east winds large flocks might be seen going across in a south-westerly direction. One day, while I was watching a flock crossing in this direction at a great height, I was puzzled by seeing a number of them below flying round and round, and about and over and even below the trees with a general inclination of flight in the opposite direction. At last I made

up my mind that they were breasting the wind in order to rise upon it, kite-like, to the necessary height. Another day I watched from the cliff a small flock performing the same manœuvres, but as the wind was north-west, they took a course over the sea which seemed, as far as I could trace it, to be south-east. Do they rise till they can see the opposite coast? or do they find a stronger wind at that height to help them?

I have often watched gulls rising in that way on the wind. Very greatly they seem to enjoy it, and they apparently have no object in it but enjoyment. Till the wind masters them, there is not the slightest motion of the wings to be seen.

STILL the same, ever the same, this outward face of things !

Time but toucheth it gently—little the change it brings.

Here, where we sat together, spreadeth the self-same tree,

Curved and matted the branches, just as they used to be.

Even the rich-toned lichen keepeth its place and form, Mellowing the old grey oak-bark, tinting it sunset-warm.

Grandly the dome of beech-trees archeth the old wood o'er ;

Vividly fretteth the sorrel the deep brown beech-leaf floor.

Even the delicate flowers cling to the same old spot ; Meadow-sweet decks the river, and blue forget-me-not. Close to the feathery larch-tree the woodbine clingeth still ;

Sweet is the rose in the valley, golden the gorse on the hill.

Cruel, cruel Nature ! tear off the treacherous veil !

Away with the smile of mockery ! tell us a truer tale ! Shatter the painful image of changeless trees and stones ;

Thou art a whited sepulchre, all full of mouldering bones !

But the solemn voice of Nature rose on the wind and said :

‘Why wilt thou still be seeking the living amidst the dead ?’

CHAPTER III

January 1, 1882.

A STRANGELY warm winter this has been, so far. I have had fewer birds upon my window-sill in consequence of it. Not, indeed, fewer of my ordinary visitors: blue tits, cole tits, nuthatches, sparrows and chaffinches—of these I have plenty; but last year the larger birds, thrushes and black-birds, and even starlings, were glad to come. But then last year the snow was deeper than I have ever known it; it covered everything eatable, and the birds seemed to eat, or to try to eat, anything they could get. I saw a blackbird, after three ineffectual attempts, swallow one of the large frozen hips of the Scotch rose: it must have been like swallowing a marble. How any birds, except those that were fed, survived that winter I cannot think. This year it is just the reverse; we have had no snow and scarcely any frost. Gales, indeed, there have been, many and violent; and torrents of rain, but no real winter.

To-day I heard the fully developed spring note

of the blue tit. I heard it a little on December 27, but it was then only tentative; now it is the perfect trill, clear though short. I do not think I ever before heard it so early. The blue tit has several quite distinct notes; and besides that, the tone of its notes varies a good deal. From its being so much more constantly on the window-sill than any other bird, I have learnt to understand its language better.

Generally, while I am at breakfast, there are three or four of them at a time, picking up the minute remains of the crumbs of the day before (their regular breakfast succeeds mine), and keeping up all the time a pretty little contented twitter which tells me that no larger bird is there. Suddenly there is a change of tone which a less accustomed ear might perhaps not notice; I look out carefully, and there is a chaffinch or some other intruder—perhaps another tit, which they think one too many for the crumbs. The discontented tone increases, and is accompanied by equally expressive irritated gestures, till at last there is a savage attack which, from its suddenness, nearly always sends away the stronger bird. The small beak too of the blue tit is probably nearly as sharp as a needle. Sometimes the discontented tone only ends in the *scolding note*. This is a very distinct note, and quite unmis-

takable. If I hear it in the garden I feel sure there is a cat about, or perhaps a marsh tit, or one of the large blackheaded tits, or some other bird that is not often there, and that is therefore considered an intruder.

I was myself severely scolded once by a golden-crested wren. I was standing by the dining-room window, which was closed, watching the pretty little thing. It flitted to and fro, and twisted in



GOLDEN-CRESTED WREN

and out of the branches of a rose-tree growing, close to me, up the column of the verandah. Suddenly it saw me, saw me in most alarming proximity. But instead of at once flying away, it put up its golden crest, clung fast to its twig, and *scolded*. It was something between a hiss and a groan—or rather grunt; in miniature of course, but I felt it deeply. You laugh? It is perfectly true, I assure you. A dog knows when it is being

laughed at, and does not like it; why should not I know when I am being scolded by a golden-crested wren, and feel it also? I was very much grieved; the more so that the little thing flew away afterwards, and left me lamenting.

The warning note of any bird seems to be understood by all; at all events that of the robin is, and being a watchful keen-sighted bird, with a loud sharp cry, it often acts as watchman to the others. I have frequently seen a bird that was feeding quietly at the window, unaware of my presence at the other side of it, turn sharply round on hearing the warning note of the robin, and look about for the danger; but the bird, especially if it is a blue tit, will not fly away till it has itself seen the source of danger, and even then, if very hungry, it will sometimes just turn its back on me and go on feeding industriously. Birds seem to fear danger less than fear itself; they do not like to be startled. And the little birds' hearts beat so quickly! Any one who has ever taken one in his hand must know that; they seem all nerves. I watched a hungry little blue tit the other day when the wind was shaking the window, at every click the little thing started and opened its wings, but it was not really afraid; it did not leave its crumbs.

Birds faint easily I have heard—was it faint-

ness or fear of the depth below that made a robin hang back in my hand one day when I had caught it while beating itself against the window of a room on the third story, and was putting it out of the same? Robins are hardly birds of the air, and though they like the top of a wall, or the peak of a low gable, they are seldom seen on high trees; and this robin may have felt dazed and awed for a moment by the height from which it had to descend. When it did so its swift oblique flight was little short of a fall with a parachute.

January 4, 1882.

What a jealous bird the robin is! or is it from pride that it scarcely ever comes to the window to feed with the other birds? It comes indeed in very cold and frosty weather; but it seems, even then, to do it under protest; there is a flash of the bright eye and an indignant pose and turn of the head which are very amusing, and express very plainly that the other birds are far beneath him and that no one has any right there but himself; all of which is sometimes even more plainly expressed by a stab with the beak. I have seen a robin lower his lance, as it were, to run at a nuthatch, and even at a blackbird. The nuthatch is feared by all more than any other bird; I have seen a chaffinch defy one, but then the nuthatch

had his tremendous beak well stuffed with bread ; he lowered it nevertheless, but both thought better of the matter, and there was no fight.

This morning when I opened the window I saw a robin hopping about below, and I called it, as mellifluously as I could ; it hopped towards me, and looked up, and seemed inclined to come ; but a chaffinch at that moment settled on the verandah, and away went the robin at once. It cannot be fear that keeps it away ; for, as I said before, it fears none of them, and can rout the whole company if necessary.

I think, therefore, it must be some kind of supercilious feeling. Perhaps it has some right to this feeling ; it stands more upright than the other small birds, has a larger and more far-seeing eye, a more lively motion than most, and a much more varied note and sensitive ear. It is an enthusiastic musician. Last autumn I was made curiously aware of the sensitiveness of its ear. I do not think my voice is particularly enchanting, but I found that while working in my garden, with a robin as my companion not far off, I could make it come to me, or fly close past me, by softly saying, ‘ Bob, Bob, Bob, pretty little Bob ! ’ and so on, for some time ; but I also found that if I was at all hoarse I could make no impression. The charm for the robin was gone with

the softness of the tone ; the bird seemed to feel the difference as much as I did.

I think the robin must have inherited the notion that its name is Bob, and that it is the bird beloved by man. It is certainly better fitted to be his companion than the other small birds ; it catches the invitation in the human eye more readily, and understands man better. I had a duet with a robin lately. I ' bob-bob-bobbed ' my sweetest, and he, sitting overhead in a bay-tree, answered each time with an elaborate strain which seemed to be never twice the same. Whether it was intended to eclipse mine or to respond to it I cannot say, but the bird seemed delighted, and was so much excited that he appeared ready to hop down upon me.

I feel sure that among the birds themselves there is competitive singing. I have often heard two and even three robins, perched on different garden-walls and answering each other, each time with a different strain, and evidently trying to outdo each other. I have also seen a blackcap and a whitethroat sing at each other, perched on two boughs of the same tree. Each appeared to be trying to sing the loudest, till at last they flew at each other, like two angry dogs. Sometimes I have thought that the duet between two robins has been a singing-lesson, and that the less capable

bird was a young one, trying to imitate its parent.

January 11, 1882.

I think that the singing of the blackbirds and thrushes is exceptionally fine here. Perhaps it is because there are no nightingales to rival them and put them out of countenance. I remember



THRUSH BREAKING SNAILS

it was the same in Leicestershire, where also there were no nightingales. Perhaps—and more likely—because there is such a large provision of snails for them in the old stone walls, and under the lush foliage of this valley. Slugs also abound; but do they eat the slugs? I fear not.

A few days ago I turned over a piece of slate that had been lying for some time in the kitchen

garden, and behold, it was a mass of snails on the lower side. There must have been two or three score of them of all sizes. I had them taken to a safe distance from the garden, and there they were left to the thrushes; but they were so firmly glued down to the slate that I doubt whether a thrush would have the power to raise them. I do not think a thrush could break the shell of an old snail without raising it and hammering it against some hard substance. I found a flower-pot saucer one day that a thrush had almost filled with snail-shells—it had made use of it as an anvil, in fact. Is not an anvil a tool? If so, then thrushes make use of tools. If it is *not*, then I suppose a tool is something held in the hand; but no sharp line can be drawn between using the hand, or nail, or claw, and using something held in the hand. Any way, I think one may say that the thrush made use of my saucer as a tool wherewith to break its snail-shells. Very good use it made of it too—good for the garden as well as for itself and family.

January 12, 1882.

I wonder what the large birds are that I have been watching from the beach this afternoon. A fisherman whom I questioned afterwards thought they must have been swans. But they were quite black against dark clouds, and therefore could

hardly have been swans, unless the black swan has ceased to be a *rara avis*. There were only two when I first remarked them, but several others joined them afterwards. They were flying at some height, and apparently were about to cross over to France, but all at once they stopped and wheeled round and round over the sea, ascending higher every time, as if they wished to get a sight of some distant destination. They did not, however, go off in any direction, but mounted higher and higher, on the wings of the wind as it seemed, for their own were outspread in almost motionless majesty, till they were nearly out of sight. The clouds stretched in a long perspective of ever-nearing lines to within a short distance of the horizon, where they terminated in curtains of purple and gold, through which some splendid mystery seemed trying to break. The sea was grand and gloomy, and corresponded well with the spectacle of these large, black, long-necked birds with arched and pointed wings, whose magnificent and ever-ascending gyrations seemed to symbolise the human soul, for ever striving upwards towards — a canopy of clouds !

Birds of passage assemble here before crossing the Channel. I have often watched them making use of the wind by flying against it to raise themselves to the necessary height, as a kite is raised.

The consequence of this is that they often appear, when the wind is off shore, to be trying to fly inland again. A very beautiful sight it is to see a large gull *slide down* the wind, as one does sometimes. It turns to leeward at a great height, and seems then to abandon itself to the conflicting or combined forces of gravity and the wind, which carry it, without one flap of the wings, far out of sight in a slow and majestic oblique descent. There are few things in nature more beautiful than the motion of a gull.

January 24, 1882.

Why are sparrows and chaffinches so much more afraid of a white plate than the other birds are? I have been putting enticing little bits of bacon on such a plate lately, apart from the bread, for convenience sake, and have been amused by the effect it produced upon the different birds. The effect on the whole is decidedly good, for whereas the larger birds used to get almost all the bacon, now the small ones get it all, though I have no doubt the bigger ones take a good deal of it from them when they fly away, making a cat's paw of them, as it were. At first when I had put the plate down they all seemed shy of it. The little cole tit was the first to venture, and took a piece off the edge. Then came the tomtit, very much alarmed but soon reassured, and taking

hold of the edge of the plate with one claw, so as to reach further with its beak. The blue tit is clever with its claws; it holds down a piece of bread with them and picks it to pieces. I see none of the others do that. After this came a robin boldly and jumped straight into the middle of the plate—twice he did this. Then followed the nuthatch, who looked puzzled and afraid, and could not reach any of the bacon, that round the edge having been removed. So I opened the window and put the bacon all on the edge, and when it came again it fed very confidently. Last came the little hedge-sparrow, creeping round the corner as it always does, but it looked much disturbed, and crept back again. All this time several chaffinches had been fluttering about the window, but not one had had courage to come, though their wish to do so was strong, I could see, and they greatly prefer bacon to bread. They are not stupid birds, and perhaps the greater fear of the unknown implies a greater intelligence. I have only seen one chaffinch—a hen—take a piece from the plate, although the other birds, sparrows excepted, are now as much at home with it as I am.

April 15, 1882.

To-day I have peeped into a thrush's nest with young birds in it; yesterday I heard the white-

throat singing vigorously ; the day before I saw a swallow, and a few days before that a chiffchaff was flitting and chiffchaffing about the roses in the garden. Three greenfinches also appeared there this morning, and I have seen a golden-crested wren about. The nuthatches are the most constant birds at my window now. If I come down late I am sure to hear one calling, as it were, for its breakfast, on the lime-trees opposite. This morning when I at last opened the window the bird almost flew in my face. I like to hear the whirr of its strong wings close to me, though it reminds me rather of the rapid opening of a fan by a lady who is a little out of temper.

CHAPTER IV

WE have had cold winds lately, and before that strange fogs and mists.

THE FOG

A BALLAD OF DEMOGORGON

‘And Demogorgon, a tremendous gloom.’

SHELLEY.—*Prometheus Unbound*.

DEMOGORGON came up the street,
His face was dark and his wings were fleet,
And Demogorgon smelt far from sweet.

Demogorgon grew more and more,
Up he came, and I fled before ;
The sea behind did ramp and roar.

I had not time to reach my gate
When Demogorgon came up like fate,
And fell upon me, and swallowed me straight.

He swallowed me up and he swallowed me down,
He swallowed me all with my cloak so brown ;
And he swallowed the hills and the sea and the town.

He has left but the bones of the skeleton trees ;
He has left me—poor painter!—to sneeze and to
wheeze :

What else can I do without light, if you please,
Unless to make doggerel verses like these ?

One very misty day I saw upon the sea, near the horizon, a long dark line which might easily have been taken for a sea-serpent, or some long undulating sea beast, for it seemed in continual motion. It did not, however, seem to progress at all; and soon I saw black specks rise from one part of the line and settle down at another part; and I scarcely needed the sudden rising up of two black divers nearer in shore to show me that it was a very large flock of those birds. I never saw a large congregation of them before, but a fisherman to whom I spoke about it did not seem to think it at all wonderful.

April 16, 1882.

A cold wind, and a hungry crowd of birds at the window in consequence. The nuthatch has a wonderful number of notes—cries, rather. I heard a fresh one to-day. I could not have believed that it proceeded from a nuthatch if I had not seen it. The note was more like that of a large mouse; it was a squeak, nothing more nor less, and appeared to be addressed to a companion in the distance; no doubt the note, though not loud, was far-reaching. The bird has become wonderfully tame, and will sometimes feed on the sill as I stand by the open window.

The song of the chaffinch is heard to-day, I think for the first time; I do not mean the chirp,

or piping note. It is incessant when it once begins, and—to me—is very disagreeable. I have a friend who dislikes the note of the chiffchaff, but that can hardly be called a song. I do not at all dislike its contented little ‘chiffchaff,’ though at times it may become rather wearisome ; but the note of the chaffinch is coarse and harsh. Besides being plebeian and inharmonious, the chaffinch is, I think, less useful than the other birds. I never see it eating the green blight on the rose-trees, as all the other birds do. Perhaps it is too heavy to hang on a rose spray ; but it cannot be only that, for the heavy sparrows do a great deal of good in that way. Perhaps they do not like it ; but it seems to me that, generally, birds will eat anything eatable that they can get.

It is curious that the old cock chaffinch, who is so tame that he flies to the window directly he sees me there, and begs for a bit of bacon, and almost takes it out of my hand, is still afraid of the white plate. I see it sometimes, if it cannot get anything in any other way, approach it very shyly, and then dart at a bit and fly away as if it were red-hot ; it must have had some experience quite special and peculiar of danger or difficulty attached to something white. It is by far the most intelligent bird of all, as well as the most bold and hungry. Just now it is extremely busy

providing for its young. It comes with its beak full, as one would think, of flies, or perhaps of a large green caterpillar ; but it always manages to take up some of my provision also. It has many a fight with another cock that would like to become my pensioner also, but which is quite cowed by the other. It has brought its young here now and then, but not so constantly as last year. Its nest is in a small juniper just across the lawn ; I can almost see the nest from the window, and could watch the feeding of the young with an opera glass. One of the young flew straight to me from the nest one day, and began to beg for itself.

In another juniper close by—a dead one and therefore just its own colour—my little lame hedge-sparrow built her nest very early, and brought up two young ones, coming to my window for food for them very often, and allowing me to go and put back the bough and look at her or her children without being the least discomposed thereby.

June 10, 1882.

‘*Quanto è allegro !*’ What bird was it, what happy but heartless little bird that called forth these, the almost last words of Garibaldi ? Garibaldi died with the window of his room wide open, while the sun was setting over Corsica. Before

the last agony began, a bird alighted twittering on his window-sill. Garibaldi saw it, and murmured, ‘*Quanto è allegro!*’ (‘How joyful it is!’) Half child, half hero, he had been all the days of his wonderful life; it must have been the child in him that the bird came to greet; and this must have been the last glad thing that his eyes looked upon. But the dying man’s sufferings were great, and his words must have sounded half reproachful, and the song must have jarred painfully on the feelings of those who were watching the deathbed.

I hope few birds are so heartless, so cruel, as my old cock chaffinch has proved himself to be in these last few days—my old chaffinch that has fed winter after winter at the window, that flies to it when I open it, and waits till I throw him a bit of bacon, which he cleverly catches flying, snapping it up like a dog. As I said in my last note, he brought his son to learn to feed here (having reared his young in the juniper opposite), and was apparently fond and proud of him. But the son learnt fast, and grew fast, and soon became so bold and greedy that he pecked at every other bird that came to the window, even the nuthatch. That, I suppose, is the reason why the bold bird came a few days ago in a sadly different and piteous condition, painfully limping on one weak leg, tumbling over when a gust of rough wind

met his poor little frame, no longer pecking at other birds, but shrinking timidly from them. Apparently he feels most safe close to my window, where I waste a vast deal of time and useless sorrow, watching to see that the other birds do not hurt him, and that he is supplied with crumbs. He may recover, for he has not lost his foot; I can see it hanging under the feathers, and he gets along a little better to-day, and has learnt to make use of his tail as a support and balance. But he grows thinner, and his eyes grow less and less bold and bright. I should not know the bird but that, when his father comes too, he begins, as well as his maimed condition will permit, to beg to be fed. There is that pretty indescribable motion of the head and wings, that form of entreaty that the young birds never seem to use except towards their parents; then for a moment the little thing, that has suddenly grown so old-looking, looks young again. And then—alas! that I should have to say it!—the old bird pecks at it savagely. Not only does he peck at his child when thus addressed, but if he hears its cry (which has grown weak and plaintive, and which can be well distinguished from the others), he flies up, and begins to peck at it as if he wished to kill it. The young thing shrinks away, looks reproachfully, wonderingly, at its parent, and takes to flight. It is gradually

learning that it is an orphan as well as maimed, and that it is utterly separated from all companionship—except mine. Fortunately it is not much afraid of me ; and, with discretion, I can manage to clear the sill of the other birds without frightening it away, though it will look about wonderingly for some time after they have taken flight, and twist its head about with a queer puzzled look, as if it were trying not only to see but to think—to put two and two together, in fact. But I am horrified at that old bird ! Does he think his child gets too many crumbs ? But I hear the plaintive cry of my little cripple, and I must take my mahlstick and defend it.

June 18, 1882.

Whether it is nature or civilisation that has performed the cure, or both, I cannot say ; but I can say with pleasure that the poor little chaffinch has nearly recovered the use of its leg, and that its father seems reconciled to it. But it has not been easy for the maimed bird to get its living, and without my constant crumbs and attention I doubt whether it would have done it. Moreover it has suffered loss. Its ways are feeble and timid, and its colour considerably less brilliant than that of other birds of the same age.

This latter circumstance confirms me in the

notion I have always held that the superior vigour of the male birds and other creatures may well have something to do with their more lively colouring.

June 25, 1882.

I went a little way up the hill to-day, and saw a pretty sight on the way. On the edge of a low roof sat six young swallows (or birds of the swallow kind) all in a row. I am doubtful about the species, because they were so very white : from the front they seemed all white waistcoat except the pretty little mobile heads, and the wings that set up a wonderful quivering and fluttering motion when the parent bird appeared in the distance. For they were being fed. The parent or parents, for I think there were two, were much darker. They were house martins, I think, but they passed so rapidly that I could not be sure. In any case they were devoted parents, and to see all the wings begin to quiver, and the six large mouths to open, and to hear the eager cries, was most interesting. But what pleased me most was the fraternal feeling shown among them : only one, or at most two, could receive anything each time the parent visited them ; and, as far as I could see, the distribution was anything but impartial. How could the poor birds remember which they had fed last ? But though the young things had to wait

so much, and to be so often disappointed, there never seemed to be the least anger or irritation in their little white breasts; they bowed without a murmur to the decisions of their parental providence, and not only that, there was unmistakable 'altruism' in the conduct of two of them. These two were one on each side of a third, which seemed weak and unable to keep on its legs; for which reason it had less chance of being fed. At least, so apparently thought one of the others; for it put its beak cleverly and tenderly under the breast of the weak one, and poked and poked till it got it to stand up: then their 'charitable organisation' was evinced, for the two outsiders propped up the feeble one between them, pressing close to it most affectionately. They were chattering all the time busily, but they never relaxed their support even when the dainty and desired bit was presented to one of the three.

The young birds never rose to meet the parent, as White of Selborne describes them as doing; if they had, there would have been a terrible clashing in the air. No; they looked and sounded like a vibrating musical cord as they awaited the parent bird. It had quite the effect of a struck harp-string upon me; not a bird left its place, only stretched itself up as high as it could, and immediately and quietly subsided afterwards.

As for the parent it generally popped the bit into one of the open mouths as it flew by; sometimes into two; once or twice I saw it catch hold of the edge of the roof for a moment to steady its aim at an open mouth. This was not unnecessary, for I saw one precious morsel dropped 'twixt beak and beak.

Two or three times the bird flew close to them without giving anything; had it dropped or swallowed it? That caused disappointment evidently, there was a general dulling. I watched till my neck ached, and then went up higher, but hearing some noisy boys coming up I turned to look again, and saw that all the little things had been frightened away except one. Was it the weak one? The 'solidarité' of the group was what struck me so much; it was like that of the long-tailed tits. How different from the selfish greediness of the young chaffinches!

CHAPTER V

September 19, 1882.

NOTHING worth recording has happened in my little bird-world, since my last entry, or I have been too busy to notice it. The summer has been cold and wet and short; birds abundant, but insect-life less abundant than usual, I think. I think so partly because the birds have been almost as constantly at the window as if it had been winter, and have appeared quite as anxious for a share of the food placed there. Not, however, the tits; of them I have seen but little till now, when they are beginning to come again.

The nuthatches, a beautiful sleek, intelligent pair of birds, with a great deal of character, have become very confident and familiar.

To-day, for the first time, I saw a chiffchaff at my window-sill. It did not take any crumbs though, and had probably been attracted by the sight of a fly. There are numbers of the pretty little things in the garden just now, chasing each other and the flies in the most lively and graceful manner, and so eagerly that they seem to take no

notice of me at all. Two of them nearly flew into my face the other day. I was watching them as they flew swiftly in and out among the plants and vegetables in the kitchen garden, and was wondering how they managed to keep so exactly within about a foot of each other, when a sudden turn brought them so directly upon me, and so close, that I involuntarily drew back and shut my mouth lest I should swallow them ! Several times they have flown almost as near me ; and several times one has flown against the window or fluttered before it, trying to get a fly on the other side.

I conclude that they find it is becoming very difficult to get a living, and that they will soon be gone. I love the little chiffchaffs, and shall be right sorry to lose them.

October 8, 1882.

I have learnt two things lately concerning birds. The first is that rooks know Sundays from week days ; and the second is that they are very fond of walnuts.

I fancy that all birds know Sunday ; at least I have often been struck when taking a walk during the time of Morning Service—going to rooks' church as it were—with the unmistakable fact that more and rarer birds were to be seen than usual, and that they were more at their ease.

With regard to rooks I am now quite convinced

of it. I have a small walnut tree in my garden. I planted it myself, and it has not borne fruit more than two or three years. It stands between my house and another, and is very near to both. This year I could see from the window about six or eight nice little bunches of nuts, and I watched them with affection. Last Sunday, as I was sitting writing, I heard a cawing and croaking close at hand that drew me to the window; and, behold, there were four or five huge rooks flopping about upon my poor little tree, trying hard to sit on its weak branches. I was not sure that they meant mischief; nevertheless, with some difficulty, I frightened them away. They came back again, and again I got rid of them. A third time only two came back, and then I thought I would watch and see what happened. In a few moments I saw one of them fly hastily away, not to the rookery, but towards the river, with a nice large green walnut in his beak. Of course I made a very sensible clatter then, and no more came that day.

This morning, Sunday, I was again unable to go to church and sat reading, when I heard an extraordinary noise in the lime-trees opposite the window, which are far from the rookery. I knew the noise was made by rooks, but it was not any of their ordinary cries; it was something between a scream and a croak. Did it mean 'walnuts,' or

was it the expression of extreme anxiety?—of a contest between their wish to get the nuts and their fear of the proximity of the houses? Probably the latter. Whatever it was, down they came in a few minutes upon my poor little tree, and I saw one huge creature trying by flapping to hold on to a top shoot from which he was attempting to twist a fine green pair of nuts. Great was the row I made, and I frightened them away. I did so again. Then I put on my bonnet and went for a walk up the hill. I was away about an hour—perhaps rather more. When I came back every walnut was gone, except one which they could not reach, and one which they had dropped on the grass.

I have long felt pretty sure that birds take their pleasure, and enjoy an unwonted freedom of mind during morning church-time, just as they always do in the early morning, but I never had a more striking proof of it than this. For I feel very sure that no attack was made on my walnuts during the week; if there had been, I could not have failed to notice it and to see its effects.

The clusters were but few; they were quite near the window and I knew each one. I rather expected to lose them all while I was away, and I should have gathered them before going out but that my longest rake would not reach high enough to shake the bough.

October 15, 1882.

The next Sunday that is, and the rooks came again! Of course they found no walnuts, but one *very* old-looking rook (all rooks look old) would not believe its eyes, but perched upon a branch opposite to the one that had borne most nuts, and began bowing to it—plunging its head forward, and at the same time opening his beak as if he expected a nut to fly into it. After a time the beak, since it took in nothing, gave out each time a sharp, harsh cry. Its gestures were so absurd that I laughed aloud. The rook looked round, but as the window was shut I think it did not see me. It certainly had a good memory, for it knew exactly where the largest group of walnuts had been. Why then could it not remember that they had been taken?

October 22, 1882.

No rooks came to-day, but they have been floating about overhead, evidently speculating on the subject of walnuts.

On the other hand there has been—added to the showers of hail and rain and golden leaves—quite a shower, as one may say, of tits at the window. They are coming back, I suppose, from their country quarters. One called my attention to the fact, a few days ago, by flying twice against the window, striking it with wings and beak. I

went to see what was the matter, and there it stood—an old bird, I think an *habitué*—in a fluff of indignation, between a sparrow and a chaffinch. Did it wish to call me to its assistance in the maintenance of its rights, or was it trying to fly through the window, just a little bit afraid of the two strong beaks?

November 12, 1882.

I saw to-day, for the first time since the very hard winter that slew so many birds, a long-tailed tit. It was very shy. There was a golden-crested wren in the garden the other day. My attention was called to it by the scolding of a small blue tit, who chose to consider it an intruder. The birds are already very tame at my window; quite a little flock of them come to greet me. I do not mean that they all settle upon the window-sill together. They are far too much afraid of each other for that. But they come and go and flit about till I put out the food, and then they take a bit and a snap, or stay and feed, as the case may be.

I believe I have as my pensioners one pair of nuthatches (one is smaller than the other, and I suppose it is a pair; but they never come quite together, and seem very much afraid of one another), four blue tits, two cole tits, one robin (or two, I am not sure; there are two about, a

pair I suppose, but they are more timid than any other bird), three or four chaffinches, one hedge-sparrow, and any number of house-sparrows. Very distinct characters, all of them. The chaffinches I can now distinguish from one another. One I call Flick, one Schmuck, but the old one who comes most constantly and flies to catch what I throw to him I call Old Joe. He is cross and covetous, and I think he overfeeds himself and is getting gouty; he hops with great difficulty. To-day, however, I interrupted a stand-up fight between him and one of the nuthatches. Few birds will challenge a nuthatch. I saw a blue tit do so the other day; but then the nuthatch had a bit of bacon in his beak, which rather diminished the power of that dreaded weapon. The cole tits, one of which is much smaller than the other, always wait till the nuthatch has filled his beak and left; then they are down upon the plate in a minute. They do not seem to care for crumbs; all the birds prefer bacon. Old Joe refuses bread till he is sure he can get no bacon.

A robin in the midst of three or four tits makes a pretty bit of colour. Sometimes I have a *wreath* of tits before the window; for a light branch of the Gloire de Dijon rose springs like an arch from the edge of the verandah, and the tits

generally alight there first, to see if all is safe. A rose looked up from below just in the middle of it a short time ago. There is an abundance of buds upon the tree still, but I suppose they will not now come to anything.

When the wind and rain cease for a day the weather is cold and frosty. A more unpleasant autumn I do not remember. A few roses still manage to open. They look like jewels in the midst of the green lawn; but the trees are almost bare, and the leaves, instead of lying like gold beneath them, are sodden and beaten into the ground.

AUTUMN

‘Paga fui; fui lieta un dì.’

Il Ratto di Proserpina.

UPON a fallen tree by storms laid low,
Amid the harvest-fields, despoiled and bare,
Sad Autumn sits. The sunset from her hair
Fades slowly; slowly fades the flush and glow
Of ruddy splendour from the bramble-crown
Above her brows; and one by one fall down
The gold leaves, crimson-splashed. About her knees
The tattered purple clings, and harsh and sere
The stubble 'neath her feet; while in her ear
The fateful voice of Winter, heard afar,
Yet ever nearer, seems to pierce and freeze
Her shuddering life-blood, and the beauty mar
Of form and feature; while the darkening air
Grows still and thick with horror and despair.

Anon a tempest rises in her soul,
And flashes fires of anguish from her eyes,
While round about the angry thunders roll,
And groans and shrieks assail the heedless skies ;
But soon the passionate fire falls down and dies.

Then sinks the queenly head upon her hands—
A broken flower ; then loosed are sorrow's bands ;
Like winds in leafless tree-tops come her sighs,
Like flooded streams her tears ; till, worn with woe,
She thinks no more upon her golden gain
Reft from her—of her glory all laid low ;
Her vines and orchards stript, her flowers dead ;
But watches as the frost-breath o'er the plain
Steals slowly ; draws her mantle o'er her head,
And waits the cold inevitable chain.

So much for Autumn. But what do the dying
leaves say who 'leave their buds behind' ? That
makes a difference. This is their farewell :

SONG OF THE DYING LEAVES

'FAREWELL !' the brown leaves sigh,
'Farewell ! we needs must go !'
Trembling they fly, then fall and die,
Sighing and murmuring low.

'Farewell, O summer breeze,
Playmate of golden hours !
Seek us no more on the tall swaying trees,
But with the dying flowers.

‘ Gaily we danced and played
All the long summer day ;
Sweet was thy breath—o’er thyme-buds thou
hadst strayed ;
Feed now on our decay.

‘ Birds, though so blithe ye be,
Farewell ye too must say ;
But while we flee to our mouldy death-bed, ye
O’er sunny seas flit away.

‘ Do not forget our sighs,
Pleasant our shade has been
Pleasant the gleam of your soft brown eyes,
Peeping the boughs between.

‘ Birds, blithesome birds, farewell !
Still let the robin’s note,
Chanting our requiem and ringing our knell,
Over our low grave float.

‘ Children, and lovers true,
Friends who beneath us strayed,
Watching the gold lights glittering through,
Do not forget our shade.

‘ We leave our buds behind,
Each in its perfect place ;
Folded and firm, its brown robe warmly lined,
Waiting the world to grace.

‘ Let not the worm intrude,
Nor tooth of frost so keen ;
O World ! O Winds ! your ways are rough and
rude,
Touch not their tender green !

‘ And when their broadening shade
Covers the green-sward hot,
There, where we once our sheltering shadows
laid,
O World, forget us not !

‘ Farewell ! we needs must go !
Farewell ! ’ the brown leaves sigh.
Trembling they go ; sighing and murmuring low,
Gently they fall and die.

CHAPTER VI

1883

THE year begins wet and warm as the last did. The thrush sings in the dawn of the morning almost as if it were February, and I have heard the note of the greater titmouse.

The birds at the window are in an extraordinary state of friskiness and flightiness. There has been a third cole tit of late ; very small and thin and much afraid of the others. They did their best from the first to chase it away ; but it comes still, and is not now afraid of the bacon, as it was at first.

The cole tits take away a large part of the bacon ; it is impossible that they can eat it all, and so speedily. I suppose the other birds get it from them. They have no fear of me at all through the window, and come fluttering down directly I make my appearance in the morning. One drops down into the middle of the plate without even the ceremony of looking to see if I am there or not, and carries off great bits, or packets

of bits, of bacon. That one never stays to eat, and evidently carries for others. I hope the robin gets some of it ; he comes so seldom himself.

January 4, 1883.

He came, however, this morning, when no other bird would do so. I went to the window with a scarlet woollen wrap over my head, as I had a cold. All the birds were frightened at me, dreadfully frightened, except the robin. He looked up at me for a few minutes, very earnestly, from the verandah, sang a little song, and then flew up and fed close to me. This he did twice. Did he think I was another sort of robin ? or was it the attraction of protective colouring ? The latter probably. I know robins feel the protection of a brown dress. That sense of protective colour is, I suppose, one of the most primitive.

February 8, 1883.

I must not allow Old Joe, the old chaffinch, to pass away without a note. He made his last appearance without a tail ; he looked very much ashamed of himself, and as if he would have put it between his legs if he had had one ; but then he would not have been ashamed, not he ! And it may have been the tail-between-legs look that I took for shame. But the birds were disgusted,

and pecked at him, poor fellow ; and he dropped himself down off the verandah, and has never appeared again. I had noticed for some time past that he walked in a slow and gouty manner, and looked old. Probably a cat, from which he was too slow to escape, drew the feathers out in trying to catch him ; or it may have been the anger of other birds, for I must confess that Joe had been latterly behaving very badly to them. He kept watch over the plate of food even when he could eat no more himself, and pecked at every bird that came near—even the nuthatch. I cannot, therefore, but feel—having, for a woman, a rather quick sense of justice—that Old Joe probably brought his fate upon himself. But I miss him ; he used to fly to the window directly I appeared in the morning, and was not content till I had myself thrown him a morsel, which he generally caught in his beak. He then used to retire under a rose-branch—a secluded corner where he could not be pounced upon—to eat it.

Another chaffinch seems disposed to fill his place, but is not yet quite so confident of my benevolent feelings towards him, though I have no doubt he is one of the two or three broods that Old Joe taught to feed on my window-sill.

A pair of nuthatches have become very tame ; they look me straight in the face when my head,



PIED WOODPECKERS

spectacles and all, is close to them, and seem quite to demand food when there is none.

Some of the blue tits are equally tame now, and the robin is a little bolder ; but the cole tits seem to become rather wilder, and I dare say I shall soon lose them. I had five little blue tits all together one day ; so fat and funny, so pugnacious and greedy they were ! I believe I like them the best of all my birds, and I am sure they have more intelligence than the others. I wonder whether their brain is comparatively larger. The head of the cole tit looks far larger in comparison with the rest of the body, and they seem intelligent too. Till this winter, however, they have not been here so much as the blue tits, and I have therefore had less opportunity of learning their ways at the window.

March 16, 1884.

A whole year has passed since I last made a note in this book. To-day two things occurred that ought to be noticed. I have seen a pair of spotted woodpeckers—a bird I believe I never saw before ; and I have heard an owl hoot and another answer it in the daytime—a thing I certainly never heard before. It was curious to watch the spotted woodpecker ; it was too high above me, but I could see the vibration of the tail that accompanied the whirring noise that it made in boring a hole

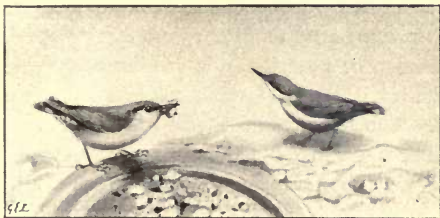
in an old branch of a tree. It reminded me of a bee trying to sting through a thick glove.

These notes were brought to a pause by a long and severe illness last year, and it is pleasant to record the fact that when, after six weeks' seclusion upstairs, I came again to the drawing-room window, I was immediately greeted by one of the little blue tits. It first fluttered before the window, and then, settling on the sill close to me, began bowing and scraping and lowering its wings in the prettiest way imaginable. It could not have expressed its welcome (and no doubt its wish to be fed) more eloquently if it had had words at its command.

The birds soon came back to me, and I fed them all the summer. Some young robins became very tame, though they did not come much to this window; they would feed out of my hand in the garden, and sit up close to me whilst I picked peas, and even settled on the pot into which I was putting cuttings. The painting of the house eventually scared them away; but at one time they used to come into the room constantly, and would sit on a book before me as I wrote at the table. The tamest of them would fly to my hand for crumbs, and had a splendid scarlet breast before it became wild.

In January of this year a very tame robin

began to come to the window, and was very bold, sending all the other birds 'to the right about'; coming when called, even from the other end of the lawn, and sitting by me with the greatest confidence as I worked by the window. But I am afraid it was an old robin that felt its end approaching, and came for a little assistance; for one day it had a dreadful fit before my eyes,



NUTHATCHES

and fell down on the lawn below. I ran down, expecting to see it dead; it was still in convulsions, but slowly recovered, and seemed pretty well next day. After that it appeared no more, and when I was told that a dead robin had been picked up in the shrubbery opposite to the window, I felt sure it was my little friend.

Nuthatches abound this year, and are full of confidence, but afraid of each other. One is very

large and finely coloured, and I can easily distinguish it from the others. The smaller ones are very much afraid of it; and if by an unlucky chance one of them alights near the plate at the same moment as the larger one, a very curious little performance is to be observed. The smaller one stands a little on one side, and avoids—carefully and fearfully avoids—looking at the other. It dares not fly away (this I have observed with other birds too) lest its enemy should fly after it; so it pretends not to see, hoping, therefore, not to be seen; or possibly it is merely that the hen waits till her mate has fed, before beginning herself. The hedge-sparrow also acts strangely on a similar occasion. It is a larger bird than most of my visitors, and the tits are often afraid of it; but it has a very small beak and head, and I observe that it endeavours, while keeping an eye on the nuthatch and its beak towards it (its lance in rest, i.e.) to hide its head under its ample feathers. I have observed these performances so many times that I feel quite sure of their meaning. The small cole tit has a comparatively large head, and accordingly its wits are its defence. It seizes the moment when the nuthatch has flown off with a beak full of bacon, and slips quietly and confidently into the plate, quite sure that the larger bird will not be back immediately. When two nuthatches

are feeding the case is more difficult and complex for the little thing, and it will wait on the bough close by, sometimes for four or five minutes, till it feels sure that the coast is clear. The sparrows treat the little birds so badly, that I do not mind sending them away. The nuthatches I cannot help liking too much for that; they are such queer picturesque birds, with so much frank character. I feel sure some of them know me: they ought to do so by the way they stare me full in the face, and I often think one is shouting at me from a tree when I walk out into the garden. I believe that the blue tits greet me also.

March 28, 1884.

In spite of the blackthorn winter the birds go on building with vigour; and I was much interested to-day by what I saw in the tree opposite my window. I believe it was a lesson in building, or rather in the fetching of materials, given by an old rook to a young one. A large lumbering creature had been there previously, and had been working with much deliberation and reflection. It evidently expended much intelligence in the choice of its twigs, and much dexterity and strength in carrying them away. Then came two other rooks; one began to work away with great rapidity and eagerness, and at the same time—as it seemed to me—with a great deal of conscious

pride in its ability ; it seemed aware that the other rook was looking on, as indeed it did, with great interest, but without taking any part in the labour. 'That must be the lady,' thought I, remembering how, when two goldfinches built a nest close to my window and I watched the proceedings, one bird only fetched the materials, while the other sat on the rail or worked at the nest. But no ; this was a different case. When the worker had as many twigs as it could carry, it flew away ; but the looker-on, instead of following, as I expected, flew down after a few moments of reflection to the place where the first had worked, and began to try to do the same. It did not succeed in getting off a single twig, though it tried hard, and at last it flew away—to take another lesson perhaps. I have seen birds teach their young to feed on my window-sill, and I have heard a singing lesson given by an old robin to a young one more than once. Of this I feel sure ; for after every stave the smaller voice tried hard to repeat it, and the old one listened so intently that it was not easy to disturb it ; so I do not doubt that 'twigging' also is taught to birds. They inherit a great deal, but not everything ; and perhaps, as with ourselves, what they inherit has to be cultivated.

March 30, 1884.

A canary came to the verandah to-day. I opened the window a little, and it flew up and seemed about to come in, and then—struck by some strangeness, I suppose—flew away. A few minutes afterwards it was beating itself against the window of the landing, and trying to get in. I opened the window an inch and spoke to it, and it chirped and shook its wings, but when I opened the window more, away it flew again. Again I saw it at the window, and I heard that it had come about the kitchen door with the other birds. Whilst I was looking for it out of the hall window, I suddenly perceived two dark brown eyes close to me, looking earnestly at me from the midst of the clematis. A blackbird has built a nest there, and is sitting apparently. I can see it as I go up and down the steps to the door. I hope no one else will do so, but alas ! it is dreadfully exposed, and if the clematis does not make haste and come into leaf and hide it, the next boy that passes will certainly see it. The old thrush's nest still remains there, though it was built several years ago ; and as the thrush brought up at least one family there, I hope the blackbird may do so.

June 13, 1884.

But it did *not*. It sat for some time there ; but one day I heard a loud outcry—such as only

an alarmed blackbird can make—and the nest was abandoned. I could not reach it to look into it, but I conclude that a crow stole the eggs. A pair of chaffinches, who built in the same clematis, probably for the sake of being near my provision on the window-sill, were more fortunate, and brought up three little ones, who all came tumbling out of the nest one day, very prematurely, frightened by my inadvertently moving the clematis with a rake. Two lodged in the branches and got back again; the other I had to pick up and put back. It had two little fluffy feathers, like ears, standing up over its eyes.

The young birds have been very amusing this year, and very abundant. As for the sparrows, there must be scores about in the garden, and they keep down the green blight most delightfully. Let no one say—as I believe Miss Ormerod does—that sparrows will not eat them. I watch them constantly devouring the aphides as fast as they can. The old ones do a good deal; but the young ones, being lighter, can rest on smaller sprays. Young sparrows seem to be more voracious than any other birds; they follow their mothers about till they, poor things, seem fairly puzzled where to get food for so many. The swallowing seems to be the difficulty, in which assistance is required from the mother; even when they have plenty of

crumbs before them, and can peck them up, they still stand shaking their wings and begging to be fed.

I was very much amused the other day ; I heard an infantine cry at the window, and going there, found a young nuthatch asking a tom-tit to feed it. It was funny to see the eagerness of the large helpless baby, and the indignant astonishment, not unmixed with alarm, of the little tit. It was an old blue tit, and accustomed to fly before the beak of the nuthatch, but quite at home with me. And there it stood with one claw in the plate, staring first at me and then at the nuthatch, which opened its great beak and shook its wings in the most childish manner, until at last, tired of waiting, it flew away.

A flight of long-tailed tits passed through the garden yesterday. They were gone in no time ; like a flight of arrows they came from the limes to the sycamore. One stayed just to feed a young one, and then away again. I enjoyed the passing sight of them though : directly I hear that well-known fluting, of which I heard so much last spring, I am on the *qui vive*. But they will never stay here now that houses and gardens have taken the place of orchards.

Some birds seem to appreciate more highly than others the comparative shelter that a garden

affords. May we not also fancy that they may like the flowers? They seem to choose their homes and build their nests with an eye to beauty. A quite lovely nest a pair of robins have built this year in the pendent ivy by the side of the tool shed; and in it, though in such an exposed place, they have managed to rear three young ones. Dear little things, I was so glad of them! One day I found the nest empty and the parents in a terrible state of mind. Two of their children were about in the garden, but were so very small and badly clothed that I came to the conclusion a cat had frightened them out of their nest too soon, and had perhaps taken the third. The parent robins have been in such an ungovernable rage ever since, whenever a cat has made its appearance, that I feel sure there must have been some unusual cause of offence. I have seen them sit both together on a rose-branch that overhangs the wall, and shriek at the cat like mad things, flapping their wings at her as if they thought they could frighten her away. I could hardly help laughing, though their agony was most tragically real. The young birds are grown to a safer size now, and can fly away. One fluttered in at the kitchen window lately. It was caught, and I put it back behind the faggots where the old robin tried hard to keep them.

I suppose few birds have so many different notes as the robin, or such expressive ones. The warning note, and the angry note, all must have observed; but I am not so sure that the long, pathetic, soft note, which is, I think, meant to draw the young ones into shelter and away from some danger, has been noticed. I have heard the note often this year, and believe that to be the motive.

A blackbird must have had its nest near. It carried away the best part of the bacon in my plate for about a fortnight, and then brought a pair of fine young ones to feed on the lawn, and even on the window-sill sometimes. There is no note I love better than the blackbird's, so I was quite content to feed them.

A greenfinch built in an *arbor-vitæ*, but found the nest too exposed and did not lay any eggs in it. A hedge-sparrow, I think, reared its young behind some sticks, and a wren in the shed. The robin has laid five eggs again in its pretty nest; but I never see it sitting on them: it is now so very much exposed, and I am so much in the garden, that I do not expect it will have the courage to do so, which is a pity.

The garden looks lovely. The rose-trees are covered with beautiful blooms and buds, and with splendid foliage. Against the background of lime-

trees stands out in one angle of the house a group composed of Oriental poppies and tall blue Florentine irises, mixed with yellow day-lilies, and overhung with large white clematis. The birds must love the flowers I feel sure.

KEEP and hold in a crimson fold,
 Rose, thy passionate sweetness ;
Let the brown bee dip, and the butterfly sip,
But keep it safe from the sun's hot lip
 And dark Death's fiery fleetness.
Yet come he will, and come he may,
For if we thought that no decay
 Would follow thy completeness,
Should we love thee, Rose—ah, who can say?—
Should we love thee then as we do to-day,
 With thy perishing passionate sweetness?

CHAPTER VII

September 9, 1884.

FLOCKS of chiffchaffs in the garden for two or three days, to the great annoyance of the robins and the great amusement of J. M. H. The pretty little, graceful, playful things seem to pay no attention to anything but the insects and each other: they have a delight in motion evidently. I saw one balancing itself on the overarching top of a stalk of maize, and I wondered how much it might weigh.

Yesterday I went down to the river to sketch, and saw four or five of those lovely grey wagtails, darting from point to point, or flickering over the pools like magnificent butterflies. Some seemed less brilliantly yellow beneath: were they young, or females?

One little robin still haunts the nest in the ivy. It seems of a retiring disposition, but is very sociable. It almost always comes out from under the asparagus or some other covert when I begin to garden, and sits close to me, gurgling a little low song in its throat, so soft you can hardly hear

it, and looking up to me with one eye in the most insinuating manner. It has never yet been driven away from me by an old robin, as so often happens ; but I have seen it listen and then fly away on hearing one in the distance.

December 1, 1884.

Is it quite as certain as Mr. Romanes appears to think, that the bark of the dog, and its talent for watching and caretaking, are derived from human companionship? I think he would doubt it if he could see the very pugnacious robin that now sits almost continually on the edge of my verandah (after having fed moderately from my plate), watching for the other birds, and flying at them when they come near the food. Its action is wonderfully dog-like as it stands there with its head down, flapping its wings and making little half-leaps which are accompanied by short sharp notes that have all the characters of a bark, and appear to have the same cause and the same effect. For my part I think it is the other way, and that it is part of our animal and not of our distinctively human nature, that snaps and barks, and watches over its property and seeks to get everything for itself. I never saw so pugnacious a robin as this is ; he drives away even the stout old chaffinch that has been 'cock of the walk' for years. He is down on the other birds so suddenly that they

have not time to think whether or not he is really a very powerful adversary. He never, however, flies at the tits. Perhaps they are beneath his notice; or perhaps he thinks they cannot eat much. I have seen even him fly before the nuthatch: this, however, he does not always do, though I doubt whether he would dare *attack* one, unless its beak was pre-occupied with bacon. I say 'he' because of the bird's militant character, but I have no idea whether it is a cock or hen. It is a curiously short, thick bird, with fierce eyes—watchful and intelligent.

What a wonderful ear the thrush must have! I saw one on the lawn a little while ago, listening, as they do, for worms, close to a noisy lawn-mower that was being worked in the next garden. It appeared to have no difficulty in finding the worms by its ear as usual! I saw something not so wonderful, but much more distressing, on that lawn a short time ago—a blackbird pecking out the eyes of another blackbird! I had seen them sparring some time before, and did not disturb them. I wish now that I had done so, for on going to the window a few minutes later, one bird was struggling on the ground, the other over it, and pecking hard at its eyes. I rushed down, but they were gone. I shall never again listen with so much pleasure to the singing of a blackbird.

December 25, 1884.

A tom-tit in his war-paint, bristling and bouncing, is apparently a terrific object to other birds ; he is certainly a very comical one. Even more comical is my pugnacious robin. He keeps up that character, and continues to sit, day by day, on the edge of the verandah, as round as a ball (he is very short-winged), looking about for something



TOM-TIT

to fight with, and putting himself into the most ridiculous attitudes, alternately inquisitive and defiant. He has, however, become much more tame ; he comes to the window directly I make my appearance in the morning, and flies up to receive his little bit of bacon. But he will not take it from my hand ; he seems afraid of that. I argue thence that it is an old robin, as young robins soon become accustomed to the hand.

January 25, 1885.

A piebald sparrow made its appearance here one day lately; a great contrast to the others, some of which are unusually black about the head. It perched on the verandah whilst the robin was sitting there. The robin gave a start and a jump; without doubt it recognised the strangeness of the sparrow's apparel. It looked up at me as if to see what I thought of it; then again at the sparrow, and then flew down to the lawn below.

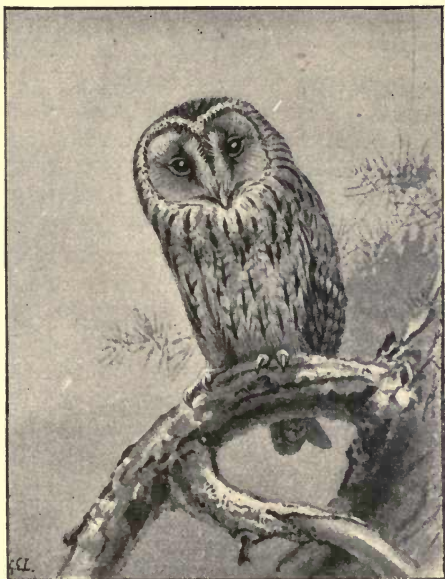
Two robins are constantly here now, and have become more friendly; indeed it is easy to see that they are already 'making up to each other.' They have been doing the strangest thing to-day! Fascination is no doubt the object; but to human eyes their usual demeanour is much more fascinating. I heard a queer little rapid song going on, and went to the window; and there were my two robins standing face to face on the edge of the verandah, and going through a wonderful and ludicrous performance. First one and then the other kept up a kind of dance and song, attitudinising like ballet dancers or nautch girls. One very pleasing attitude appeared to be throwing the head forward and on one side, and gazing fervently at the sky. Whilst one of them acted the other looked on in a state of admiring stupefaction. They were not easily disturbed or my laughter would

have discomposed them. At another time I saw one robin taking lively leaps of a foot or two into the air, apparently without the aid of its wings. Another little trick transfigured the bird so completely that I could not believe it to be the same till it came up to the window afterwards—quite its old self. It had managed to make itself very small and upright, with a high crest and a prominent beard, which went on wagging about as the little thing warbled very softly and rapidly, with wild eyes directed towards the other robin.

The blue tit that took up arms against the others has appeared again of late in such a tiger-like and malicious state of mind that I am obliged to chase it away. How does the creature do it? It frightens them all—even the nuthatch, with whom it had a pitched battle lately. It suddenly seems made of steel, and looks as sharp as a spear-head; then it crouches like a tiger, and spreads its wings and rushes—and away goes any bird whatever, even my bold robin. When I frighten it away from the window-sill it attacks the birds that settle on the roses near. The bird must be possessed by a devil of some kind. The very expression of its face is savage, and its attitudes are still more so. It moves its head in a wiry, snake-like way that I never saw in a bird before.

There is a quite wonderful difference in the character of individual birds even of the same kind. The large-headed birds certainly seem to me the most intelligent. The little cole tit, for instance, seems more than half head, and it is curious to see how its quickness and ingenuity serve it in the place of size and strength. One little thing I generally find waiting here in the morning for its bacon. It flies towards the window and flutters a greeting in my face, but then looks about for the robin, knowing well that I always wait till he is there, and then open the window and feed him first.

I had a strange experience one frosty night lately. I was just going off to sleep when there came a lovely note from the window—soft and penetrating and single. I started up and listened, quite bewildered. After a pause it came again, and this time not single but combined with others that left no doubt that it was an owl sitting on the sill. But it was the mellowest, downiest song ever heard. It came again and again, and I was quite sorry when it left. I heard it again further off, and then it was more owlish. I suppose it softened its note when so near the house out of precaution lest it should wake the inmates.



TAWNY OWL

OWL SONG

TO-NIGHT I heard an Owl call, out of an old elm-tree :
'Hullúllalalóo!' it seemed to say, and I thought it
called to me.

‘Now, Owl, I pray, what do you say, alone in the dark on the tree?’

‘O nó-no-no-nó!’ the Owl replied; ‘it is not dark to me!’

‘Then, Owl, tell me, what do you see?’ ‘Blind mice, one, two, and three:

‘Hullúlalalóo! to my mate I call, to come and sup with me.’

April 2, 1885.

There have been young robins about for two or more months. Is it my feeding them, or the mildness of the winter, that has made them so early? They are almost fully red-breasted, and already quite tame—to me, at least—coming when I call them if they are near enough to see me. The old ones make a rendezvous of my window, and stand here listening for the voices of their young ones—listening very anxiously apparently sometimes, too anxiously to eat; sometimes waiting with a bit in the beak till they have heard the right song, and then away goes the bird and the bit. I think there are two broods about, some younger than the others. I have heard the soft, long, calling note of the mother more than once. I say mother instead of parent; but I do not know, only guess, that it is the mother that makes that pathetic appeal.

May 25, 1885.

Thrushes about this year, but not blackbirds. Perhaps they are offended or inconvenienced by

the constant imitation of their note by the starlings.

I think my little cole tits (one little pair has been very constant and tame all the spring) are only just building their nest. One came yesterday with a beakful of sycamore blossoms; it was passing, apparently, but turned aside on seeing my plate of bacon. The little thing was about to peck at the bacon when it seemed to remember that its beak was already filled, and flew away busily in the direction of an orchard near, which I have no doubt is full of birds this year, as the house is unoccupied. The cole tits have such pretty, dainty ways that I should think their nests ought to be very delicate affairs. I had a goldcrest about my *arbor-vitæ* lately, but I think the other birds objected to its presence.

My two tame robins are almost worn out with the labour and anxiety of bringing up their family. Two little things were cheeping about in the garden a few days ago, but I think they have gone further now. One was picked up by my servant at the gate some time ago, and brought in for the night. Workmen have been painting and plastering the house outside, which has increased the trouble of the parent birds; but, on the other hand, there are no cats next door this year. Very thin and shabby my poor little robins

look now. The cock has lost the courage that made it attack other birds, but it now and then, when the men are away, sits in its old place on the verandah. It comes at my call, even from the trees sometimes, and seems glad of its bacon, though it will not be drawn aside by it from that continual listening, listening for the little dull and distant chirp, or *cheep*, of the young birds. That sound is called 'weeping' here in Devonshire, I find; in the Bible it was 'peeping' in the account of Hezekiah's illness. The Revisers have, I see, altered it to 'chirping.' I should call it 'cheeping.' Probably when we pronounced the *i* in the Continental manner, peep was spelt 'pipe.'

June 20, 1885.

I thought I had lost my robin. Only one has come of late, I think, and this one did not seem to like the new and much lighter colour of the verandah, probably thinking it was now too much exposed. I breakfast downstairs, too, in the dining-room now. On the sill of that window, however, he appeared a few days ago, just as I was thinking I had lost him. I was at breakfast, and called him and threw some crumbs on the carpet, and he came in and took some, but seemed afraid to stay. He has come at my call twice lately. To-day, when I went to the window

at dinner-time, he flew up close to me and was glad of some crumbs, but, as he was eating them, one of its two young ones came hopping up to share the food. Immediately the old one flew at it and drove it away, and it did not return. And no doubt the reason why the old one so seldom comes now is that it would be setting a bad example to the young ones, who have to be taught to fear human treachery. The old ones are right, no doubt, but I am sorry.

June 22, 1885.

The garden is full of young birds; to-day a family of blackcaps took possession of it for a little while. I saw them here a short time ago when they were younger, but I never had a visit from blackcaps *en famille* before. They were very shy.

Yesterday the garden was indeed *possessed*. I never saw anything like it. I think the birds knew that it was Sunday, and that there would be no shopboys or other comers. A hen blackbird brought three of her children—such a noisy crew—and dug a large hole for them in my central rose-bed. She pecked and scratched and flung the earth about just as a mother hen does for her chicks, and the young blackbirds pecked away at what she turned up just as young chickens do. Only it was all done with much more noise and

violence ; one would have thought the old bird wanted to dig up a rose-tree. It was an amusing sight, and she must have gone on with her excavations for a quarter of an hour or more. I saw young thrushes being fed too. There were sparrows and chaffinches innumerable, also robins and a water-wagtail. I think that now the roses are coming out, the insects form a great attraction to the birds. If Miss Ormerod could see the way in which the young sparrows pounce down upon the rose-trees here, and strip them of blight, she would no longer doubt that they eat it. Eat it when they can get it, that is ; but when they are older and heavier it is not so easy. A sparrow cannot hang on the point of a leaf or sit on a bud as a tit does ; but where sparrows can rest, there they will feed greedily on the aphides. I think, to judge by the way in which they tumble about, they have to learn by experience what will support them.

July 1, 1885.

The birds that I supposed were blackcaps may have been marsh tits. I had a young marsh tit yesterday on the roses close at hand, making the same complaining little note. The black head deceived me.

My robin is in and out of the window continually, feeding on the bacon scraps that I place

in the corner of the room for him, or on my desk. He is not the least afraid, but seems to think it is a secret between us, and so he never comes in if another bird is near. He carries away a good deal, and has, I think, young ones below. If so, that must be a third brood.

I have the very noisiest little wren in the garden this year that I ever knew; and I think it is the smallest, although, from its ways and general appearance, it seems to be an old one. I do not know what I had done to offend it yesterday; but it sat down in the path before me with tail and beak well up in the air, and scolded at me as if I had been robbing its nest; the little thing was in a perfect passion. Perhaps it did not expect me to be gardening just then, and was building a nest in the faggots close by. It built one first so very near a door and path where there was much going to and fro that I think it was obliged to abandon it. This is in a fuchsia-tree, and looks very pretty, but is very conspicuous. I put my finger in one day when I thought it was abandoned, and found it cold and empty. I put it in later, and there was one minute egg; again I tried, and the egg was gone—removed to another nest, I fancy.

July 6, 1885.

The abundance of young birds about just now is wonderful; quite unusual, I think. They over-

flow from the garden into the house. I was going to water a large pot of *Agapanthus* in the hall this evening, and had indeed begun doing so, when I saw a young robin sitting there and looking at me. I must have wetted the little feet. It seemed all mouth and fluff about the head; but when I had caught it (which I was obliged to do, as it flew upstairs), and taken it out of doors, it flew easily to the nearest tree. A young thrush was also caught on the top of a picture this morning; and yesterday I had to catch a garden-warbler and to put it out, lest it should pound itself to death against the window. Earlier in the year I had to catch a nuthatch, which wanted to bite.

I put my robin's food in the room now, having discovered that he knew where to find it and would come for it. This saves the trouble of driving off sparrows and chaffinches (no others come now), and it is pleasant to have the little fellow hopping in and out so confidently and continually. He takes away a good deal for his young ones. He still looks on his visits as our secret; he comes in so quietly, and will not come at all if another bird is near.

July 28, 1885.

The robin came in twice yesterday, and flew about the room in an excited and inquiring manner. He began by flying towards me on the

sofa, and made a circuit nearly round my head. I felt flattered, and thought it was a mark of affection from my little friend. But the second time another person was on the sofa; and I am inclined to think that the attraction was a tall figure of Dante's Beatrice hanging over the sofa. She is clothed in a long flowing garment of bright scarlet over a white tunic, and stands against a bright sky. From the colouring, the picture is as likely to attract a robin as it once did a little boy of about three years old, who was sitting to me for his portrait. 'That's a nice girl,' he remarked, peeping round me and my easel. The robin loves scarlet, I suppose, or he would not be scarlet; and I judge so too from the way in which he now and then looks down at his own waistcoat.

November 15, 1885.

I doubt whether it is this same robin (more likely it is one of its children) that now feeds at my window, and has done so for more than a month. His ways are different; or hers—I think it is a hen, from its want of boldness towards other birds, and from the delicate, almost whispered, song that it sings to me now and then. It calls me to the window with a peculiar sharp little chirp that I do not think it uses on other occasions. I hear it at once; and if I do not go at once to

the window, the bird repeats it more loudly, and again and again till I appear. But it seems to wish not to be heard by the other birds, more especially by a certain pert hen chaffinch that waits for the crumbs that fall from the robin's table, and that does not always wait, but that flies upon the prey as I fling it down to the privileged little thing sitting with its back to me on the edge of the verandah, looking over its shoulder, and greeting me with a gratified flap of its wings when I appear. That, I suppose, I am to take for a smile. It does not often come up thence to feed, as I do not put the plate out yet. I leave it on my desk near the open window when I go out of the room, and it comes in and feeds at its leisure. Last Sunday it came in, I do not know by what window or door (probably the front door, which was invitingly open), and regularly explored the house. I do not think there was more than one room that it did not visit, and of that the door was closed. I followed, to let it out, but it did not care for me, or avail itself of the window I opened. Now, however, windows must be closed, and we (i.e. I and the birds) must return to winter ways, for there was a first white frost this morning.

This morning the tits and nuthatches made their appearance again at breakfast; very smart

and cheery, but as tame as ever. Birds have a good memory for some things. I think my little robin really loves me and feels grateful ; it sits on a rose-spray that has crept under the verandah, and looks down on me while I dine in the room below ; I think it is its night-roost. It sings gently to me all the time ; or rather it makes significant listening pauses ; and perhaps after all it is singing to an answering mate, and not to me at all ! At any rate, it looks quite bewitching there, pressing its little soft red and white bosom against its green perch, and warbling most delightfully.

November 28, 1885.

Do herons eat little birds ? Surely not ; yet I think it was a heron that to-day filled the red breast of Bob with mortal alarm. At least so it seemed. I heard him piping on the edge of the verandah as usual, asking for a bit of bacon ; but when I went to the window, opened it and threw the bacon to him, instead of picking it up, he stood quite still, with his right eye laboriously turned towards the zenith ; and so he remained, staring. I called to the bird, asked what was the matter, threw more bacon ; but he did not move. Then I opened the window wide and looked up ; and there, passing over the house and flying at a great height, was a heron ! That was what the robin was

watching. I spoke in my prettiest bird notes, and told him he was quite safe in my neighbourhood ; but no ! till the bird was out of sight he watched. Then, in a moment, he was all hunger and confi-



ROBIN WATCHING HERON

dence again. Perhaps he thought it was a hawk, although the size and motion and everything were so very different from a hawk's. Perhaps it had been taught to fear all large birds. For that birds, besides learning from the example of their

parents, are definitely taught by them, I feel sure. I had thought that herons did not eat small birds ; but Miss L. tells me she has seen a heron eat a sparrow, feathers and all ! She thought it must be choked, but it was not.

DYING NIGHT

WINDS of the dawn, melodiously sighing,
Sigh softly on, for gentle Night is dying !
Grey grows her face, the pale lids slowly fall,
And white mists shroud her, like a funeral pall.

Her patient stars are stealing from the sky,
Her owl flits far away with mournful cry ;
Her ghostly blooms close up their honied store,
And tempt the downy haunting moth no more.

Softly her children slumbered on her breast—
Farewell for ever to that sheltered nest !
Farewell the tender folding of the arms
That kept them safe from perils and alarms !

No dreaming more for them, for, cold as snow,
The bosom of the earth receives them now.
Therefore, O winds, sigh on with mournful swell.
Farewell, O gentle Night ! Farewell, farewell !

CHAPTER VIII

March 14, 1886.

A LONG and trying winter this has been for both feathered and unfeathered bipeds. To-day it seems colder than ever, and the ground is so hard that the strongest beaks can make but little impression on it. A peewit has been strolling about on our lawns, and I hear of many others, and also of snipe and other unusual visitors. We have had but little of the vast visitation of snow that has buried half the world this year, and slain its thousands of sheep upon the mountains of Wales and Scotland, and not a few poor shepherds and others.

My loss has been a bed of yellow crocuses. Two days ago they were beautiful, and the admiration of every one who came to the door. Suddenly I perceived one morning that there had been what seemed a miniature tornado in the midst of them; the blooms were torn off and scattered on all sides, and also torn to pieces. I watched long before I discovered the malefactor in a very large thrush that I had seen hopping about

the lawn a good deal lately. There it was, gobbling up the beautiful golden petals as a rabbit 'tucks in' lettuce leaves! Not content with the full-blown flowers, it tore the nascent buds out of their sheaf of leaves, and even pulled up one crocus by the root. Since then I have several times seen it feasting there, and I know it is the same bird by a small white feather in one of the wings. It seems an old bird, and its movements are slow; perhaps from starvation; perhaps—as I think I have heard—there is something narcotic in the crocus. I frightened the bird away twice, but it was of no use, and now all the yellow crocuses are gone. It has still left the white and lilac ones, and I am curious to see whether these will be spared much longer. It has not come to my window, although I see it at times looking up at the birds feeding there. I should send it away (with a blessing) if it did come, as I keep very select company at my window this winter, and will have nothing to do with the large birds. This is for the sake of my two tame robins, who were with me all last summer, and have been here ever since. I have also six blue tits, two cole tits (one with a spot on her forehead, whom I call Spot), a hedge-sparrow, and occasionally a nuthatch; this last, however, I do not encourage. The robins call me when they want food, and sit close beside me,

and look up into my face in the most friendly manner. The cock is especially confident. He has a particular phrase of his much-varied music for me. The robins know my voice and come when called, and like to be talked to. They catch one's eye too, in a way that I do not think the other birds do. The cole tit's eyes can scarcely be seen ; they are so involved in black : this must be a protection to those delicate organs, always first attacked by another bird.

June 14, 1886.

Winterly weather still ; though we have had touches of mild summer. My robins and cole tits are as faithful to me as if they had little to live on but my scraps of bacon. But they have raised a good many young ones, and those want feeding. Just now a cole tit called me to the window (it has more voice now) and when I appeared with food, it was followed by a flock of little ones—of two ages, I think. One lovely little thing, evidently just out of the nest, sat a long time on the verandah, and was fed there. Its colours are lighter and brighter than those of the older birds. The white patch on the head and that on the cheek are bright and large ; the black very deep and glossy, but only above the eyes, while that under the chin is scarcely perceptible : the back is a lovely grey green, and the bars on the wings well

marked. The sweet little fluffy thing paddled its feet in the rain in the gutter of the verandah, and tried to sip some up. The old birds were very fussy, and much excited, calling the young ones with quite loud notes, and carrying off beak-loads of bacon, of which they seemed to eat but little themselves.

A thrush has brought up one brood in the garden, and is now sitting again, this time in the *Pyrus japonica*.

1887.

This year the tom-tits claimed my hospitality again, and I had no cole tits. They do not seem to be able to associate even to the extent of feeding at the same window. On the other hand, the robins have been there continually, and also in and out, feeding on my easel. I am beginning to think that it is jealousy and greed, and not affectionate discipline, that make the old robins so anxious to prevent young ones from sharing one's favours. The old robin has been curiously careful all the year not to come in when the young one was about. However, the young one found its way into the dining-room below, where also I had put food for it.

Two blue tits became very tame, and towards the autumn were always to be found hovering about the window when I came down in the

morning. They hung upside down on the sides of the window, and shivered their wings at me with pretty little cries of delight and expectation—expectation which was speedily gratified with little bits of bacon. Thomas and Thomasina are a lovely pair, and their ways are charming. The hen is very small; yet I think not young, she is so very wise.

My garden this year was privileged. Notwithstanding that there was building and garden-making going on near me, I had a golden-crested wren's nest in the juniper, two thrushes' nests one after the other, and a fly-catcher's nest. This last was built in the first empty thrush's nest in the clematis on the house. I felt sure that the fly-catcher must be building in that nest, though it carefully avoided entering the clematis exactly at that point. In the autumn I had it taken down, and, true enough, there was the flycatcher's nest within that of the thrushes.

March 7, 1888.

I am rather miserable about my robins. The young robin has taken possession of the drawing-room window now that the lower one is shut, and it drives away the old one so savagely that the poor little thing is frightened to death at it, and will not come till it feels sure that young Bob is not at hand. Sometimes when, after long listen-

ing, he comes to that conclusion, and hops up to me and looks up into my face, and I open the window and talk to him, and feed him—in fact, just as we are quite comfortable together—down comes that young brigand upon him like a thunderbolt, paying no attention to my presence, and away goes my poor old friend, with the young one after him, and I am left lamenting, and so cross that for some time afterwards the young one receives nothing from me but a scolding. In fact, I think he has come to the conclusion that what he is to get he must seize rapidly. Yet I have not the heart to chase him away entirely; he is the roundest robin I ever saw, and very handsome and bright-eyed. He is very short-winged and short-tailed, and splendid in colour; but his boldness distinguishes him quite as much as anything else. I saw him defy a nuthatch once, a bird that is a subject of alarm to all the others, and one that, for that reason, I do not encourage. Bob Junior, however, does not molest the blue tits; he seems to consider they have a prior right here, and the gentle little hen I spoke of lately used to feed close to him with the greatest confidence, holding a little bit of bacon down with her foot, and pecking quietly at it till it was all gone. But a little while ago she had a fright; the robin came down on her suddenly just as she was going to feed—put

his face close to hers, and glared at her as if he was going to peck at her eyes. I saw them become fixed and glassy; she seemed horrified—paralysed; she evidently felt that it was all over with her, and could not move. I came immediately to the rescue, and the robin flew away. But she did not. She could not move for some time, and since then she has avoided Bob. Her fear of him shows itself in another way too. Not having much voice to call me with, as her mate does, she hit some time ago upon an ingenious plan of her own for doing so by means of a rather prolonged series of little taps with her beak upon the wood-work of the sash. She cannot reach the glass, but when she has tapped, she rises on her toes, as it were, and looks in to see if I am coming, or flutters against the glass. This she has done for some time now, and has found it very effective; but since the fear of the young robin has fallen upon her she has almost abstained from tapping lest the sound should bring him up. Two little taps are as much as she ventures on generally now; and they are quite enough if I am there. She is a very wise little bird; there is no doubt of it.

One very curious observation I have made whilst watching the pair of tits; a very suggestive one on the interesting subject of *origins*. The two seem very much attached; they generally

appear together ; but the hen always waits till her mate has fed. She sits on the rose-tree till he flies away, and then comes and takes her share. He, nevertheless, begins to feed without first calling her if he happens to come alone. On the other hand, if she comes first and begins to eat, and he arrives just after, he comes fussing and grumbling and angry. She gives place to him in a moment, but does not fly away. No ; the curious part of it is that she stands aside, with her head carefully turned so as to look *away* from him, fidgeting all the time with unsatisfied appetite ; but not till he has finished, and flies away, will she look in that direction ! I remember observing the very same thing with a pair of nut-hatches that used to frequent the window at one time, and have watched these proceedings often enough to feel sure that they would occur again under the same circumstances. In both cases the female was a good deal smaller than the male, yet it did not appear that they were in the least afraid of their husbands. No ; it is not fear. What then is it ? It seems to me that it is an incipient feeling of etiquette or decency. That is a feeling that must have a very ancient origin in animal history. It is probably the consequence of a feeling of *unprotectedness*—of exposure to danger during certain actions—which is the original cause

of their being accomplished apart from others. Animals are shy while eating because the head is bent, the mouth and eyes are engaged, and a sudden attack would find them unprepared ; hence the custom, and from custom has come etiquette. The origin of drinking healths, of *pledging* each other when drinking, is, I believe, something similar. When men wore dangerous weapons and feuds were common, a man who raised a flagon to his lips for a long draught, hiding his eyes and engaging his right hand, was exposed thereby to a stab from any enemy who happened to be at hand, and therefore a friend pledged his word to protect the drinker. Hence the custom, and etiquette.

March 20, 1888.

Snow and cold winds continue.

LET the cold snow lie still. Lie still, cold snow !
Ye sunbeams, touch it not, but leave it so ;
The worn and weary earth sleeps well below—
Lie still, cold snow !

Her flowers had budded and had blossomed fair,
And decked her bosom as with jewels rare ;
Then came a quick sharp wind and laid it bare—
Sleep, flowers fair !

They budded, blossomed, and were withered so ;
They bare no fruit ; but do not let them know :
Deep be their sleep beneath the sheltering snow—
Let them not know !

We have diligently fed our birds, and kept them alive and in fine feather. Strange to say, not one of my yellow crocuses has been eaten this year, though thrushes are continually about the lawn. The taste of that old thrush must have been peculiar; or he may have been suffering from some disease for which he had been recommended to take yellow crocus!

The swallows will be late this year, I think, for the south of Europe seems still buried in snow. Talking of swallows, I remember recording, some years ago, how I watched for some time the feeding of some young ones on a low roof, and how very irregularly the old bird did it. I have come to the conclusion that it was my presence that disturbed her on that occasion, for I watched a similar scene last year, and was astonished at the regularity and impartiality with which the old bird performed its task. I watched for some time, and she never made one mistake, though sometimes several minutes must have elapsed before her return with another fly. At last, however, another swallow, the mate, I presume, came with a fly in its mouth just as she was feeding one bird, and put it quite in order into the beak of the next. This seemed to disturb her very much; she sat down (so to say) beside them, and began to chatter and twist about as if to reproach the other.

Perhaps it was to express confusion, or perhaps she was asserting the claim of the next on the row. At all events, when she returned next time, she evidently remembered all about it, and gave her fly to the right bird.

The old robin comes more frequently now, though the young one is as fierce as ever against it. Can this savage fellow be the child of the other?—one of those for whom he laboured so successfully last spring? I am afraid it is only too likely, or the little brigand would not feel so much at home here.

I had but one robin's nest in the garden last year, and that was the work of a foolish and pretty young pair that built in some ivy close to the gate, and within reach of the eyes and hands of all the school-children who pass to and fro twice a day. Unfortunately I did not see it till too late—not indeed till the young were out of the egg—or I should have removed it. One day I heard the click of the gate, and saw boys running down the lane, and went at once to see if a catastrophe had happened. There was an empty nest, and one poor little unfledged robin dead on the ground. The others appeared to be 'peeping' and piping and struggling among the shrubs in the next garden; but as they could neither walk nor fly, no doubt they perished.

The old robin was more successful. It built its nest in the hedge on the other side of the road going up the hill. The boys found it out, I believe, for Mrs. Halse overheard them talking about it, and I suppose they thought it better to leave the young until they were fledged. But the old bird was too clever for them. She must have got them out of the nest very early one morning, before they could fly, and managed to get three of them, at all events, into my garden, under the gate, I fancy. She knew no doubt by experience that it was a comparatively safe place. On passing a gooseberry bush near the gate that day, I observed a tuft, or rather a small thick layer, of withered grass on the top of it. Thinking it looked untidy, I raised it, and was about to throw it away ; and behold ! there was a dear little round speckled thing under it, with bright surprised eyes, looking up at me from the very middle of the bush ! wondering, but quite still and not afraid.

Of course I replaced its cleverly and carefully prepared shelter, and took care not to let it be disturbed. The old bird could hardly have devised a better fortress for the little thing, the youngest, no doubt. It remained there two days, I think. Two others were stumbling and cheeping about the garden for some time ; one took an awkward flight into the kitchen window.

The young pair, after sitting for a day or two in a melancholy mood on the gate or near it, gazing at the spot where the nest had been (for I had removed it), went further afield for their second home, though they came to the window occasionally. Whilst they were feeding their first brood at the gate, they used to come backwards and forwards constantly from them to the window, feeding their young with the bacon which no doubt slipped very comfortably down the little throats. They came flying straight to me when I came down in the morning, and seemed to hear my voice across the lawn when I called them.

March 21, 1888.

Why putting the head on one side should be an inquisitive gesture, I really cannot say; but certainly the robins do it as well as their human 'superiors.' This young robin, who is not sure of being always in favour, because I have sometimes scolded and sent him away baconless when he has been chasing my old friend, comes now with a tentative air, stands beside the plate with his head well on one side, and looks up in my face. The expression of inquiry, which is of course solely the effect of attitude, is quite perfect and unmistakable. Is it an accidental coincidence? or do others of the lower animals express inquiry in the same manner?

CHAPTER IX

February 1890.

It is long indeed since I recorded anything anent my birds ; not because they are at all less interesting to me, but because, naturally, the small incidents of their little lives repeat themselves, and there are but few perhaps that have not been observed and noted either here or elsewhere.

Nevertheless, I have been noticing lately something very pretty that I had not before observed. Two little cole tits have been waiting on me for some months past, till we have become excellent friends. They are quite familiar with me, and flutter in my face confidently and closely (the glass between, though), and hang on to the sides of my window till they must know the contents of my room almost as well as I do myself.

This little pair is a much-attached one ; if one of them comes, the other is sure to be at hand, and to appear before long. The rule is that the cock bird, which is much larger and more strongly marked, and more masculine in manner, should

come and eat first, and then the little hen takes his place. She is curiously small, and seems as light as thistledown, and her wings quite cross over her back; there is something distinctly feminine and infantine about her ways. Perhaps



COLE TITS

that is why the other (Tit-willow I call him) is so careful of her. Careful he certainly is, as the incident I am about to relate will prove *to any one who will believe it*; it is likely enough that no one will do so who has not seen it, and that is why I send no account of it to 'Nature' or the 'Selborne

Society's Magazine.' I, for my part, have seen it several times, and feel no doubt. If Tit-willow comes, and finds that there is but one piece of bacon left, he will fly to the little wife sitting on the rose bush close by, and urge her to come and take it; and the way he does this is very curious. The beak supplies the place, it appears, of both fingers and lips; he darts it towards the food, and then towards her. If she still lingers, he goes behind her, and darts his bill at her again, but I think without touching her; I have even seen him apply his bill to the place where the ear is, or should be, but I heard no sound. This was done when she seemed exceedingly unwilling to go; she was, I think, afraid of a robin that she saw about to come, and that he did not see; for as soon as the robin had gone, she came immediately.

Birds are much more human than any one knows who does not watch, as I do, a few tame ones *at home*. Their gesture-language is so clear to me now that I fancy I can understand what they are feeling, and what they are thinking so far as it is thinking, as easily as if they could speak. I can see the balance between the instincts of fear and hunger gradually shift in the case of new-comers; and watch the gradual increase of cordiality, or at all events of tolerance,

between them and the old *habitués* of the window-sill ; and I think I can trace in some of them a growing perception of my countenance, as distinguished from my dress and general appearance. This, however, may be fancy, except in the case of the robins. It is the privilege of Bob to understand the human eye and gesture, to say nothing of the voice, the tone of which all animals understand more or less.

I had a tapping tom-tit till lately, but alas ! it has vanished. It used to come and press its little yellow-green bosom against the bottom of the glass of the window, holding on with difficulty by the woodwork, and peck gently and look all about in the room for me till I went to feed it, when it would take up a waiting position on the very tip-top of the highest rose-twigg it could find, and then let all the others feed before it came itself. It seemed as if it tapped for the good of the community ; strange to say, though they seemed glad to have the service performed for them, they never tried to do it themselves.

After being nearly all day at the window, the little tapper vanished suddenly, and I fear will not return now, and the birds find it difficult to make their presence known. One tom-tit has taken to turning over the fragment of a broken water-colour palette on which I put their food : he does it very

noisily, and I think it may be meant to remind me that it is empty. How the little thing does it I cannot think, unless it is by pecking hard at the inside of the edge. It is a large blue-cap: they differ much in size and colour, as well as in character.

The little hen cole tit has a deal of quiet wisdom in her comparatively large head, and this seems to serve her instead of strength in maintaining her place among the larger birds. Apparently she has economical propensities, for she carries away more than any of the other birds; it is more than she can possibly eat, and she must needs store it somewhere. The male bird never does that; he feeds and goes his way.

January 1891.

The hen cole tit mentioned in the last paragraph still remains with me; but I have come to the conclusion that her propensity is acquisitive rather than economical. She cannot be said to store that which she takes away, for she carries each little bit of bacon to a separate place, and, as far as I can see, pays no further attention to it, and probably forgets where she placed it. That she cares for its safety at first is plain from the skip and twist and sharp look-out that she gives to see that no bird is in the way likely to snatch it from her.

Mrs. Brightwen, in her charming book 'Wild Nature Won by Kindness,' speaks of the cole tit as storing food, and I have seen the same assertion in another book about birds. Still, unless a store has been found somewhere and traced to the bird, I think it must be a mistake. The male bird does not even carry it away, except to a place where he can eat it comfortably.

I am grieved to record the death of Tit-willow. He was found lying dead on the top of the wall lately, and so it is his poor little hen who has to wear the willow ! At first she did not seem to miss her mate ; but one evening it seemed to strike her that she had not seen him for some time, and she sat upon the rose-tree and piped for him in a most plaintive way, looking anxiously all about her and in amongst the branches of the rose, as if she thought he must be hiding somewhere. Since then I do not think her motions have been quite so lively ; but she carries off the food, and flutters and hangs about the window, as much as ever.

The tapping tit has returned, or another has taken to the habit. I think it must be the same bird, he is so very much at home, and so masterful. Very lame he is too ; he shakes his wings at me most lovingly and gratefully, particularly since he has been treated as an invalid. He appeared for some time with one poor little leg tucked up in

the feathers of his breast, and staggering about on the other in a most painful manner. He has now nearly recovered. I suspect a chaffinch of having given him a vicious peck on the thigh.

There is a curious blackbird about here just now. It has a broad white band all down the back from the head to the tail, and when the wings are raised it is evident that the white feathers cover a great part of the back. It is by no means beautiful, and I think the other birds are rather shy of it.

The robins were curiously tame and sociable last summer and autumn, and still, when I *do* get out, they come to meet me. If I stoop to look for violets or anything, they will sit in a bush close by, and warble softly in my ear almost. Quite a whispered song it is, so soft and sweet ! If one did not see the little thing's throat moving, and its eyes fixed upon one, it might easily seem to be a bird at some distance to which one was listening. There were three little robins brought up in the rose bush close to my window, and it is probably those that are so sociable ; but I have heard of their singular tameness this year in other places. Their confidence is not misplaced, for they seem in high favour. I hear of no catapulting this year ; and it is said that a butcher-boy is in the habit of putting a little bit of meat on the

post-box opposite, as he passes, for a robin that lives there. I hope I may flatter myself that my 'leaflet,' the address to boys and girls published by the Selborne Society, may have helped to produce this pleasant change.

Many larks have come down from the snowy hills, and pick up every bit of green food they can find—cabbages, parsley, everything. They do not seem to take any of the various food that is put out for the other birds; but I have not tried them with grain of any kind. Two were picked up dead in the garden.

WINTER SUNSHINE

O GENTLE winter sunshine, slant and pale !
Thy timid smile falls sweetly on the earth,
And warms the poor chilled Singers into mirth—
The Poet, and the Robin on the rail.

Pale winter sunshine, weak as infant's touch,
No marvels wilt thou work while thou art here ;
And though we feel thy power to charm and cheer,
When thou art gone we shall not miss thee much.

No rose will open its warm heart to thee,
Nor Earth at thy demand yield up her fruits ;
The hidden ferns around the beech-tree roots
Will not unfurl thy pallid gleam to see.

The sleeping crocus buds will still sleep on,
And willows wave bare branches o'er their tomb ;
But thou, athwart the leafless forest's gloom,
Wilt gleam where summer sunshine never shone.

CHAPTER X

December 21, 1876.

I AM very much amused with the birds on my window-sill. There were no less than five blue tits feeding there just now. So many do not often remain amicably there together. They maintain their feeding-ground against all comers, even chaffinches. This morning a robin had a fight with one of them, and though it at first conquered its little adversary and had its feed, it was driven away at last by a tit that flew straight at it. I fancy the tits' beaks are very sharp and strong.

By-the-by, I saw a flight of blue tits chased out of a spinney of larches not long ago by the long-tailed ones—it seemed by mere force of noise. Apparently the blue ones could not bear the shrill whistling any longer, and away they flew in a body. Perhaps they felt that in that case the bottle tits had a prior claim to the feeding-place.

March 26, 1877.

I am more and more impressed with the resemblance between birds and children; in both

the motive of every action is evidently a mere balance of instincts. The blue tits are, I suppose, courageous because there are so many of them. Two or three together seem afraid of nothing, and even one will feed quietly on the sill when I am quite close to the window, provided it can keep a window-bar between my eyes and its own—just like a baby that hides its head when it is shy, or an ostrich hiding its head in the sand. After all, in each case, it is the fear, and not the danger, that has to be got rid of.

May 20, 1877.

I have had such a pretty little pleasure lately. A pair of goldfinches have built a nest within two yards of my staircase-window, on a bough of the sycamore-tree which I planted myself, but which is now higher than the house. It is nearly at the extremity of the bough, and swings to and fro to such a degree when there is wind, that I am almost afraid they will have to abandon it again. It is just in the draught between the two houses. Yesterday the wind was very violent, and though I saw them go out and in then, I have not done so to-day. Indeed, I have not seen them at all; I hope nothing has happened to them. Anyhow, I have had the pleasure of seeing them build it, and it was a pretty sight, for what do you think they built it of?—*lauter Blumen!* At all events, as far

as I could see, they fetched nothing else at all but the long blossoms of the sycamore and the long sprays of the forget-me-not. A more perfect piece of protective mimicry could hardly be imagined. Looking up from below, it is scarcely possible to make it out from the tree and sky. The window, of course, they did not reckon upon, as it is never opened; the top is covered with a blind, and the lower part with flowers in pots. I am afraid though that the passage to and fro of lights at night (if they happen to open their little eyes) will amaze them very much; and O, when the wind blows, how that cradle will rock! The babies are certain to fall out unless the eggs do it first. The cradle is firm enough, and seems part of the tree. It was so pretty to see them pop out of the nest and flutter down upon the forget-me-nots with a childish cry of exultation, as if they had found them afresh each time. One waited on the rail and looked, unless the worker (the male, I suppose) found it very difficult to find the right piece or get it off, and then it joined him but did not help. Perhaps hers was the little head I saw moving so rapidly within the nest, weaving it in and out; or does the male both fetch and build? Then they danced and sang over it so! Sometimes they reminded me, I am sorry to say, of ballet-girls dancing

and weaving wreaths, and waving them about before building a bower for the heroine or *première danseuse*; for the long blossoms were not managed without a good deal of graceful agility on their parts. [I add here from the notebook the sequel to the story of this goldfinch's nest.—Editor.] The birds' delight, which was even greater than mine, was an artist's delight, I feel sure—that which an artist feels in beginning a new picture, or the delight so well described by Jean Paul Richter of a young man who has an idea and is going to write a book. An artist, indeed, is apt to feel, as one of them (Orchardson, I think) has said, that he is 'always beginning the good picture and finishing the bad one.' But with these little artists it was all rejoicing from beginning to end, till the eggs were laid; and then a quiet, patient, but still animated little head could be just seen above the thickening foliage. When I looked at the nest from below I could see nothing of it; but, alas! the little artists had not been so careful to guard against the eye of an enemy overhead. One day, after the birds had been for some time sitting on their eggs, and I was looking forward to feeding the young, a terrible catastrophe happened. I was at work at the other end of the garden when I heard a loud screaming and fluttering in the sycamore-tree,

and, looking up, I saw a large black creature fly out of it. Whether it was a crow or a jackdaw I was not near enough to see, probably a crow, for they abound here, and it must have been large and powerful enough to carry away the eggs whole, for there was not a vestige of one in the nest when I next looked. The birds too went. Late in the year the branch was cut off, and the remains of the dead flowers were still hanging upon the nest, which I have.

April 27, 1878.

Do not *all* birds imitate to some extent? If not, this is curious. I watched a cole tit singing and hopping about close to my window the other day in a rose bush. I learnt its note by heart—a triplet, rather wiry, and one emphasised higher note at the end. Next day I heard it again on a tree and went to look, the cole tit being rarer here than the others, and lo, it was a blue tit doing it! I watched it for some time. It exerted itself more than the cole tit, and the note was perhaps rather less loud; otherwise it was exactly the same, and I heard the same thing to-day. Now I know perfectly well the notes of the blue tit; it has several, but they are not like that. Was it imitation? I believe I heard a starling doing it the other day—at least, I could see no other bird near, and it was louder than usual.

May 5, 1878.

Birds are very delightful, but I have almost blinded myself to-day watching flocks of flycatchers and golden-crested wrens, &c., in the trees by the river ; the leaves being scanty at present, it was almost like looking at the sky, which was bright, but more white than blue. But O, the pretty little dears ! they seemed more in the air than on the trees ; sometimes quite dangling in it from nothing at all. And I believe I saw an instance of another kind of imitation. I had been just watching a yellow wagtail wagging away on the stones in the river, when I saw something wagging on the tree above. Strange, I thought, for they never seem to settle on trees ; so I looked nearer, and it was, I believe, a flycatcher *vigorously* wagging as the yellow wagtails do. Children and monkeys are imitative ; why should not birds be ? I have heard a robin give a capital singing lesson to another. It was most interesting to watch the pains the old bird took to set its copy, and the young to copy each little stave. They did not mind me, so intent were they.

December 29, 1881.

Did I tell you what a very clever starling there is here ? I think not, though he has been performing all the autumn ; now and then he adds

to his accomplishments. I may have told you that he imitates the laugh of the woodpecker



STARLING .

(yaffle), for that he did last year; but now he (I call it he because he does it in such a masterly way) sits on a neighbouring chimney-pot just about the time when the dinner is cooking, like a priestess of Apollo on her tripod, inspired no doubt by the fumes and warmth below; and there he holds forth. First comes the laugh, as if to call attention; then the blackbird is imitated—so well that if you did not see the bird you could not believe it was a starling; then the twittering of swallows, then the warning note of the robin, the croak of the rook, and once I think I heard the quack of a duck. There can be no mistake about the others. And the bird seems to enjoy it so. ‘*Er brüstet sich,*’ as the Germans say, and stands as if on tiptoe, and turns his head from side to side with the most absurdly affected and self-satisfied air. He takes great pains; and in spite of his airs and graces is quite absorbed in his performance. One would think he had an audience before him of all the birds in the air, but generally, he has only before him the wide expanse of earth and sky from which to draw inspiration. Sometimes one sees another starling sitting a little below—his mate, I suppose—looking up at him with evident admiration; and I have now and then suspected that he was aware of me and my admiration in the garden below.

Some starlings seem to remain here, but I think large flocks come and go also, passing south, I suppose, and returning.

The birds at the window are curiously numerous and tame this year, considering how warm it is. It may be in consequence of the absence of berries. I have not seen a holly-berry this year.

May 25, 1882.

How I wish birds ate slugs! I am afraid they do not. I am not sure about starlings. Do they? Bless them if they do! I never had so many young birds in the garden before, and O how amusing they are when they come to learn to feed on the window-sill! It is the swallowing that is the difficulty with young birds evidently. I have watched many young chaffinches being taught to feed. They soon peck a bit up, but cannot swallow it without assistance. I have been laughing aloud at a young chaffinch to-day; it pecked up a long bit of bread, and of course could not manage it, but was for all that quite determined to hold it against all comers. And so it did; with its back to the window, and the piece of bread for a lance, it defied them all, putting its little head down, as if it was going to fly at them. A number of birds came—sparrows, chaffinches, and even a nuthatch; but it held its ground and

its bread, and they did not peck it. At last, when all had gone, another nuthatch came and pecked at it, and sent the little thing away, bread and all. It is the child of the old tame chaffinch.

The other day a fine blackbird flopped suddenly down on the window-sill. He was bold and eager, looked me all over, and evidently thought nothing of me, though he was close to the window. He packed his beak as full as he could, and proceeded to feed a young one that was sitting crying for food, on the edge of the verandah, and then away they both went. Presently I was recalled to the window by the clattering of the plate on which I put the bacon, and there I found the hen blackbird at work. She took every fragment that she could stuff into her beak and tried a long time to get in more, and gave a wicked stab with it, all the same, at a poor chaffinch who wanted his share. She evidently 'looked before,' and knew that when she came again the plate would be empty, as it proved to be. Then her instinct was at fault; for she seemed to think that if pecked and stamped and stabbed at long enough, the plate would at last yield up more bacon. She flapped and danced and stamped and tugged till at last she dragged it off the sill, and away it went, down the verandah roof and on to the lawn. The bird flew away, very much alarmed—'the bird

ran away with the dish.’ Plate unbroken, and bird soon feeding from it again as if nothing had happened.

Can you tell me what bird it is that utters a delicious liquid, long-lingering ‘glou-glou,’ loud and clear and slow, from the top of a tree? I thought it must be Hebe, pouring out amber nectar into crystal vases for the gods in the sky; but it was a long-winged brown bird, rather larger than a cuckoo. I could not get a near view of it, and only heard it twice; it was very delightful.

June 23, 1882.

I have lost my tame robin; and it was so tame!—perhaps it will appear again, but there are such flocks of chiffchaffs and flycatchers about in the garden that the timid little thing may be afraid of them. It seemed so very shy of birds.

No doubt I am related to the birds through my grandmother, who was devoted to them and kept a roomful; and I always was Jenny Wren, and wore a brown gown, and would not go too fine. Nevertheless, I think that the real reason why birds are so tame with me is that I go softly and alone.

December 8, 1882.

I have quite a flock of birds every morning now at the window: one nuthatch—such a funny,

bold, inquiring bird—hangs on to the sill and stares me full in the face, moving his great head and beak from side to side, a pair of cole tits, three or four pairs of blue tits (O, so fat and so pert and busy!), and sparrows and chaffinches without end; but the robin ‘remains out,’ as the Germans say. I cannot get the robins to come and feed with the other birds, though they do watch their opportunity and come sometimes. But they are the tamest of all the birds in the garden, and also I think the most thoroughly musical. I had a duet with one the other day; it was just above my head in a bay-tree. I sang to it, ‘Robby bob—bob—bo-o-o-b!’ and it answered immediately; then I, then Bob; and so on, ever so long, till I was tired. The bird evidently enjoyed it, and hopped about looking at me as if it had half a mind to come down upon me. The cole tits are very confiding, gentle, graceful birds; but they do not seem to take so much notice of one.

The starling that I mentioned as having a talent for mimicry has been imitating the thrush lately admirably. I was quite puzzled one day to know which it was (for the thrushes have been singing a good deal), and so went to look for it, and watched it for a long time. It was giving its performance evidently with immense satisfaction

to itself, sitting on a chimney-pot with its head on one side, and its feathers all abroad.

December 23, 1883.

I do not feel sure that I am writing sense, for the robin is most distracting. He is very tame, comes when I call him, and can stand almost any disturbance. Having finished his breakfast, he thinks of the future, and guards the plate. The way he does it is most comic. If a bird comes down the robin darts at it, even if it be a nuthatch; and while on the watch he twists first one way and then another, and then dances a little, always with the head on one side, as if he were deaf with one ear and listening hard with the other. Away he goes, and the others come. Well done, hedge-sparrow! it has sent two chaffinches to the right about.

But a little while ago, a valorous tom-tit flew violently upon a nuthatch that was feeding quietly alone, and actually made it shout out and fly away. Very courageous these tom-tits are!

Back comes Bob—clucking, and very angry to find the crumbs gone.

April 10, 1885.

Fancy Mr. Morris not knowing of the presence of the nuthatch in Devonshire! I have written

to assure him of the fact. [To the note thus sent Mr. F. O. Morris wrote in answer :—‘ There is no doubt from your accurate description that your birds are the nuthatch, and I will enter the place in my interleaved copy for any future edition, and will mention your name in connection with it.’—Editor.] They seem to me very numerous ; but, then, so are high trees, and no one looking from this window would think we were near the sea. I have heard of a lady here who had six nuthatches that visited and fed at her window. I had two of them, and two robins, a blue tit, and a cole tit, all at my plate together yesterday. I wish Mr. Morris could have seen them ! They do not always endure each other’s company so peacefully, but I was there to see fair play, and they knew I should do so.

My robin pair come together now, and carry off, instead of eating, neat little bits of bacon carefully chosen. They dart round the corner into the orchard, where I conclude sitting is over, and several young throats are gaping for food.

April 24, 1885.

When one sees a small bird chasing a large one, as one often does, I think we may safely conclude that the larger bird has stolen an egg or something from the small one (unless it is a hawk,

then I think the little birds fly after it by way of 'keeping mischief before them'), and that, having its mouth full, it is unable to peck.

It is curious how much more confused the instincts of a robin are than those of a tom-tit, though the robin is the more human of the two. Here comes one with its beak full of food for its young, but it wishes to pack in a piece of bacon too. Then another robin appears below, and off goes number one to dance to it, food and all—the baby for the moment forgotten. Very human!

December 10, 1885.

I have two robins, three blue tits ('Yes, Bob, I'm coming!')—he is continually calling me to feed him), and two cole tits, who are always expecting to be fed. The two robins fight, but the robin does not fight the small birds. It is pretty to see a blue tit, with its quicker wings, steal a bit of bacon flung to the robin, and then fly round the robin's bewildered head as if it were laughing at it. The cole tits always wait till larger birds have filled their beaks; then they come with perfect confidence. I have positively to fight with the old chaffinch to prevent it from eating everything up. I do not encourage the nuthatch; I am so afraid for my robin and dear small tits. They are such companions; but they make me

open the window oftener than I should, though only for an instant.

August 17, 1886.

I find my opera glass (euroscope) of great use in bringing the birds within watching distance ; but it is curious how quickly birds find out that they are being watched. I do not think there is anything they fear so much as an eye ; and, by-the-by, it occurred to me the other day to wonder whether the eyes on butterflies' wings might not be, for that reason, slightly protective. I assure you, as I was watching one of those brown butterflies with eyes on their wings the other day, I felt just as if the thing was looking at me through them. And to-day I noticed a small moth (dark orange bordered with black, I think) with eyes on it that had two very small specks of white on them which exactly answered to the reflected lights in the eye ; those sparks, mysterious to the ignorant, that used to be taken to be the soul itself. Some have three great eyes on each wing staring at one. If I were a bird, I am sure I should be frightened at them.

November 28, 1886.

My uncle John was a great lover of birds. He not only had a good collection of stuffed birds, and of books on them—Gould's magnificent folios, Bewick's, &c.—but also an aviary full of gold and

silver pheasants, cockatoos, parrots, &c. Before him his mother was devoted to them, had a room given up to them, and kept nightingales in song through the winter, and an overpowering noise they made. They had list on their perches, were wrapped up at night, and were fed with meal-worms, chopped egg, &c. This love of birds is a passion which has, I think, descended to me and to some others of our family. Uncle John could imitate the nightingale's note so exactly that I have seen, in the twilight of evening and our shrubbery, a nightingale fly down to him, and almost strike him in the face as it passed. We had birds among our ancestors, no doubt. I used to be told when a child that I was like a robin.

That young robin has come back ; not quite so tame, but I think it is the same. It flashed past me the other day as I stood at the window, and took refuge in the darkest corner of the room, an angry parent after it. It comes for its breakfast as regularly as a certain tom-tit. The ways of the two are comical in the extreme, or rather the tit is comical. The robin's ways are graceful, and pretty, and lively, and insinuating. I never had so bewitching a one before.

June 30, 1887.

I am very birdy still. Robins have been hopping in and out of the room all day, carrying

off bacon for their young. And there is such a piping and peeping of young birds! Two broods of young thrushes have been brought forth in my garden (and now they are eating all the strawberries, quite unripe!—ungrateful things!). Then there was the brood of missel thrushes hanging over the road, and some dear goldencrests built in a small juniper. Though the tree was so small, and the nest within reach of my hand, and I could watch them fly out and in, I never could see it till the birds had left, and I could pull the boughs apart, so cleverly had they hidden it. It could be seen though, I suppose, by sharp eyes, for I was standing at the window one day, and I saw a butcher's boy, as he passed under the tree, all at once put down his basket and *go for it!* Fancy my horror and the energy of my deprecation! I soon made him understand that was no business of *his*. I have been in a fright about it ever since, and was glad to hear them all uttering very lively miniature pipings last Sunday in a way that showed they were ready to be off; and so they were, early next morning, and now one hears them all about the limes and Virginian cedars. It is not altogether a pretty note, like scissors rather, but the wee things are so pretty, one likes to hear it. The nest is most curious. I took it down when I was sure they had done with it. It

is like a cluricaune's cap, with the opening below. All the dirt had accumulated at one spot on the lower edge, so evidently the birds must have clung inside the hanging nest. Did you ever see one? I knew they hung.

The flycatchers that built in the clematis are gone; I do not feel sure whether they got their young away safely. If, as I believe, they laid their eggs in the old thrush's nest (they were in it, or very near), it was so accessible that I fear they may have lost their eggs or their young; at all events they came no more. The thrushes' nest in the black-currant bush against the garden wall had a curious fate. The young birds were looking very wise and nearly ready for flight one morning when I went to look at them, and soon after the old thrush was heard to scream out by Mrs. H., who took no notice. When I next went, after dinner, behold the currant bush had broken away from the wall, and the nest was almost upside-down, and, of course, empty. The nail and string had given way. I searched in vain for any young thrushes, but they must have got away safely to M.'s shrubbery, as I soon heard them cheeping sharply there. But one was, as usual, weaker than the others, and that one, I think, must have been left behind concealed under the rhubarb leaves; for two days after we found it under the

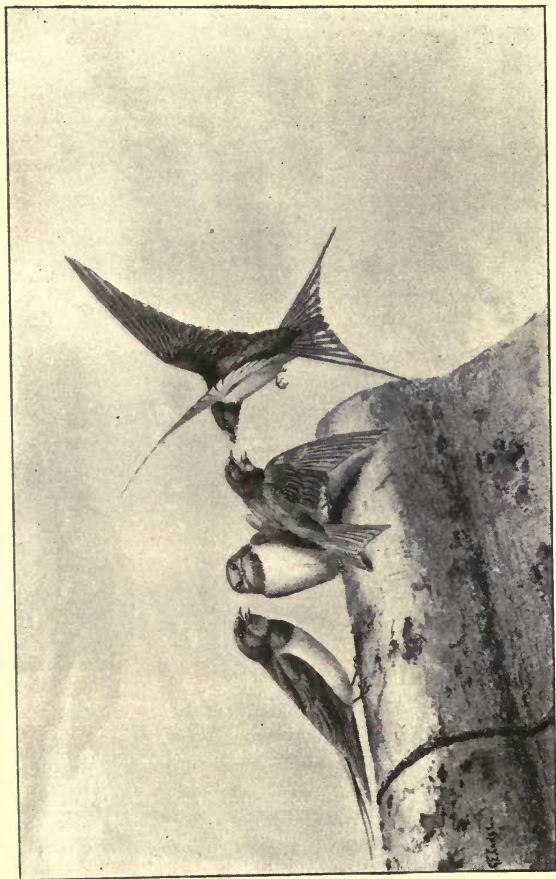
long wire defence that I had put over the late-sown peas, and which joined, with an opening, on to the rhubarb. It could not walk, but had scrambled to the other end ; and there it lived on very contentedly for three days, the parent coming to feed it. I put a rhubarb leaf over it, and thought it a very nice safe place. So, I suppose, did the old bird, or she might have got it out by the way it went in. She herself had been caught there a short time before, and made a fine fuss. I had to let her out.

The young pair of robins that lost their brood by the gate have come back now with another well-grown family, and I think the old robins have two broods about ; any way there are a great many of them, and I am very glad of them. What should I do without the birds and roses !

August 19, 1887.

I think the little straddle-legs you ask me about must be a young robin ; but it must be a very young one for picking up crumbs at a window. I am afraid it must have lost its nursing parent, or it would not be allowed to do so. I have a theory that one parent takes two nestlings under its charge, and the other another pair, and that they keep apart. I may be wrong.

The flycatchers are very busy here just now, snapping and twisting about ; they have to be



SWALLOWS

quick to follow the rapid evolutions of the winged things they feed on. The other day, after a good hard shower, they were tumbling about in the strangest way on the grass, pursuing the insects that had been *floored* by the rain.

Do you remember my letter in 'Nature' about the six little swallows having their dinner, in which I had to remark that the parent fed them very indiscriminately, and by no means each in its turn? Well, the other day I watched the feeding of two, on a high roof above human interruption, and I was amazed at the regularity with which the bird gave each a fly in turn as it passed; and that too though several minutes must sometimes have elapsed before it returned. I feel sure it was *one* bird; for once, just as she had popped a fly into a little beak, the other parent flew by, and put one into that of the other; whereupon the first parent, instead of flying off as usual, settled down beside the one it had just fed, and began to chatter. Perhaps it meant: Be so good as to go back to your own charges, and do not interfere with my proceedings; if you do, I shall forget which to feed next. Perhaps it was making a note for future use—that *that* one was to be fed next, although it had just fed it. Any way, everything went on as before, and the right bird had it next. I waited to see if it would be so.

November 19, 1887.

Tom clings upside-down to the window, and asks to be fed. He manages, when I am very inattentive, to get up a miniature squeak. I am sure he would do more if he could; and it is curious that a creature that will have a fine loud, clear, thrilling call about two months hence, should be so dumb now.

CHAPTER XI

January 28, 1888.

IF I did not talk to the birds my jaws would grow stiff. The tits have grown quite imperious. Tom scolds loudly, hanging above my green curtain, till I go to him, and then he shakes his wings with delight, and goes to fetch his wife, if she is not pecking at the window below. She has taken to doing that very often and loudly : is it for want of a call ? But I believe it was she who the other day sent forth quite a sparkling fountain of little silver notes as I looked at her. She is so much smaller than Tom that I could not be mistaken. Tom sings too at me if the scolding does not succeed ; a loud trill it is, and quite irresistible. But they waste my time dreadfully.

March 18, 1888.

Did I tell you that that small hen tit had taken to tapping at the window for me ? at the wood-work ; she is not tall enough to tap at the glass, but she jumps up and looks to see if I am coming afterwards. She woke me up tapping at my bed-

room window one morning at seven o'clock. She could not have known I was there, and was probably trying windows in general. She is very wise for her size.

May 13, 1888.

Two sweet young thrushes' heads are peering out of the nest in the yellow jasmine on my wall, and so far I have prevented them from being taken ; though I caught the bookseller's youth one day, with his hand burglariously threatening the nest, and his feet among my flowers, and I have had a bird-stealing mason in the house. Oh, the birds are so funny just now ! My two tits imperiously demand to be fed with bacon still, but the cock feeds the hen now and then as if she were a young one ; and she puts on such ridiculously infantine airs, and emits such baby croakings from her open mouth. The next minute she is feeding herself as cleverly as ever. Can it be a game of play ? Do they play at nurseries as we did at houses ? The robins do the same. I'm puzzled. Poor old Bob goes about without a tail. Has he pulled it out, do you think, to adorn his nest ? Or has some dog or cat grabbed at it ?

May 15, 1888.

The birds certainly have an æsthetic faculty both for sweet sound and brilliant colour. I wish

you could have seen my tame cock robin one day. He was *very* shabby himself—almost stripped—moulting, I think, and so was his wife. I had been bewailing their condition for some time, and so had they ; the cock looked piteously at the place where his scarlet and white ought to have been, and seemed quite humbled and low-spirited. He was standing so on my verandah one day, having bits of bacon thrown to him, when suddenly there alighted on the window-sill a fine young robin—the handsomest I ever saw—and in perfect plumage. You should have seen my bird!—he went off into the wildest ecstasies, flamed up with unmistakable admiration, and danced and sang and erected his crest at her ; never was such adulation ! But she was quite indifferent to the poor little shabby fellow, and quickly disappeared, he after her.

Both my robins are about now constantly with their two fast-growing and extremely hungry little ones ; they never seem to bring up more than two here.

March 27, 1889.

One of my tits, who has learnt to tap for me, hangs on with his feet to the bottom of the window, and tries to catch hold of the glass with his wings. Such a scratching he makes !

May 26, 1889.

I was quite wrong in supposing that the robins had lost their brood. There are three young ones about in the garden, and as only one of the old ones is in attendance on them, possibly a fourth may have gone off with the other parent. They do divide their forces in that way I know. Three are too much for one robin to feed ; even with the assistance of my almost constant supply of bacon, the poor thing looks worn to a shadow, a bag of bones and feathers rather. I believe I, mainly, am bringing up three large families (one of robins, one of blue tits, and one of cole tits), to judge by the great packets of bacon they carry off in their beaks ; and in such a hurry ! The blue tit was in such a flurry yesterday that it came in to see about supplies, and then could not get out again ; so I had to catch it and put it out.

It is curious how different the cleverness of one bird is from that of another kind. Glass never puzzles the robins ; but this old and very clever blue tit, that has fed here for years (I believe), cannot see it or find its way out. Several times I have had to release a blue tit from the window. The cole tit is wonderfully intelligent (it is almost all head and legs, so it ought to be !), but it dares not venture in. And yet it has not a speck of fear outside, and carries off larger packets of bacon

than the robin even, and so curiously well-packed. It has no *fear*, but it takes good care not to encounter a larger bird than itself, and never comes till the others have fed and the coast is clear of them.

One of the little robins (a very fine bird) is wonderfully tame. I made its acquaintance whilst digging up some ground for a new violet-bed. It came up confidently at once (its mother did not know, evidently,—or—), pecked about, examined my boots curiously, looked up at me to see the connection, walked in and out of the prongs of my fork, and found a good-sized slug, out of which it proceeded to peck the life, and also part of the substance. I did not know that so small a bird would eat a slug. It could not manage a worm, and pecked shyly at a woodlouse. It is always about the kitchen door, and if I turn up earth in the garden it is nearly sure to come and see about it. It eats moderately of bread, but is always friendly to my maid and a great resource to her.

It seems wonderful that with a dog on each side of the house the old robin should have been able to keep these three little feeble fluttering things out of harm's way; but the ingenuity it shows, and the terrible anxiety it sometimes undergoes, must be seen to be believed. *The*

hiding-place is under the rose hedge, amongst the thorns and weeds ; twice I have found a heap of dry grass laid over where the small thing had been placed (I knew the meaning of it from having once found a young robin hidden under grass in the midst of a gooseberry bush), but now she ventures to feed them in the oval bed in the middle of the garden. Here there are generally two together, but sometimes one joins its elder brother, the little gardener, in the back garden ; sometimes they fight, and sometimes they flutter off, and she loses them. She had the smallest by her the other day as I stood by the dining-room window, and, seeing me, came to ask for something. I gave her some bacon, and while doing so the little one slipped through the hedge, and she could not find it. So she put the bacon down in a safe place, and went about looking for it, and the expressiveness of her actions was something wonderful to see. Up and down, and in and out she went, with growing terror, and then began a soft low moaning sound that I have often heard used on such occasions. It seems attractive, but still little one did not come, and she came to me, hopped up on the window-sill, did not touch the bacon but looked inquiringly into my face, asking as plainly as possible if I knew where it was. I was obliged to say that I did not ; then it began again, and went

through into the next garden—found it, and immediately came back to fetch the bit of bacon it had hidden, and lured its child back to safety—to my relief as much as that of the bird. I should be grieved if anything happened to them.

July 14, 1889.

I think you must be the E. H. who writes in 'Nature' about flies and swallows. It is not only swallows, as of course you know, that suffer from parasites. About a month ago I was standing at my drawing-room window, when an old blackbird alighted on the lawn just before me, and began to twist and turn, and kick and scratch and peck in a most vigorous and remarkable manner, more especially towards the region of the tail. I thought the bird seemed to be hurt or in convulsions, and went to see if I could render any assistance, but it flew away. When I went back to the window, there was the bird again in the very same place, and doing the same thing; and as it did it, I saw quite a cloud of little gnats or flies rise from it. It rubbed itself so on the ground that I thought there might be something in the grass there that would help it, but the spot was like the rest of the grass.

August 8, 1889.

A tamish cole tit has just been here, asking for bacon and quite at home, yet it must be two

years at least since one has been here feeding. Then a pair were constantly here, and brought their young. Can this be one of them? I wonder.

August 27, 1889.

I am writing with the window open, and an opera-glass at hand, for there is such a piping—squeaking, rather—in the cedar opposite! Golden-crests or very young tits; I should say the first, only Thomasina came just now and clung to the side of the window and asked for food (for her young, I should think), which I gave her. She seems very good friends with a handsome cole tit, who also comes here now. They are almost my only visitors at present; dogs and cats have abounded so of late that the old robin keeps watch in the sycamore and will not let the young ones come. She dashes at them and drives them away.

I fancy the young males of the first brood are learning to sing just now. At all events, there are very queer snatches or phrases of song or conversation to be heard. Very short and sketchy they are. The young birds *are* golden-crests! I caught sight of one in my glass just now—a fine little kinglet; but they do flicker out so quickly!

December 11, 1889.

I had a curious visitor on Sunday. I was feeding my tom-tits in the afternoon at the drawing-

room window, and rejoicing in the beauty of Tom's new wife, when I perceived on the lawn below, not far from the path, a very large bird pecking and pulling at the grass, and staggering or waddling about in a very strange manner, and going backwards every now and then. On bringing my glass to bear on it, I perceived (as I had thought beforehand) that it was a green woodpecker—a very handsome one too. I watched it a long time ; it seemed dreadfully hungry, and it evidently found great stores of ants. Presently a girl came up the path with a note, and passed close to it ; the bird took no notice, and when she put her hand nearly on it, it just jumped away a few paces and fed on. So by-and-by I sent my servant down to see it, as she did not know the bird. She walked up close to it quite quietly, and it took not the smallest notice. My curiosity was excited, so I wrapped up well and went down gently to it, and stood beside it for some time, admiring its red crest and wondering. Then I put on my spectacles and stooped down to look more nearly at the mystery, and behold it was blind ! When my head was near, it felt something, and turned its head to bring the other eye to bear on me, and then retreated a few steps, so I think perhaps it could see a little with one eye. I could not see that it had been wounded or

injured in any way, but its eyes were *glazy*. It was fat, apparently, but birds look fat when they are not so, and the poor thing must find it dreadfully difficult to find its food. No doubt that was why it so steadily adhered to my ants' nests. I have seen green woodpeckers at them before.

It went on eating and pecking and pulling for an hour or more, and, indeed, only flew away when it was almost dark.

February 6, 1891.

By-the-by, Mrs. Brightwen says that the cole tit *stores* its food. I think she is mistaken. My little hen cole tit, at all events—the little widow, who with her late mate has been under my observation for two or three years—does not *store*, though she *takes away* incessantly till the plate is empty. She looks round well first on both sides, turning as on an axle, with a little skip, and where she sees no bird near, thither she carries her morsel, and lays it on any convenient branch—on the point where a twig starts generally, and apparently thinks no more about it. I have seen her carry it quite to the top of one of these tall limes. It is not an economical impulse apparently, but an acquisitive one, and it appears to be her strongest. The male bird never did it.

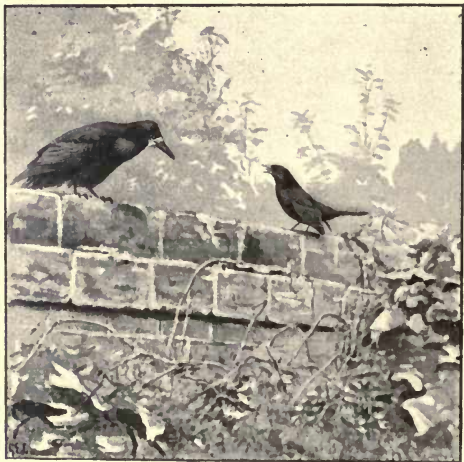
Are thrushes usually considered imitative birds? I suppose they all are more or less so,

but the way in which a thrush here imitates the quack of a distant duck is marvellous. How does it arrive at such a low note? It also, *I believe*, imitates the squeaking and scrooping of an infirm wheel-barrow that used at one time to go up and down this road a good deal. It caught that up last year, but it has brought it out again now most emphatically and unmistakably. The thrush has not naturally a note like a wheel-barrow with a loose unoiled wheel, has it? I think I have heard it imitating a robin. Thrushes are numerous here just now, but blackbirds seem to have vanished. Perhaps they are offended or inconvenienced by the starlings, who are perpetually imitating them. *I should be, I am sure*; all the more that the imitation is so good.

June 20, 1891.

I think I told you of our imitative thrush. It has been away, or silent, for some time, but piped up again yesterday on the same tree-top. Just now it imitated the noise a hen makes when she has laid an egg so exactly that I could not help laughing. But the bird makes long pauses now between its performances, as if it were listening or trying to recollect. I think I told you it imitated the gull, but I find it was a peacock that it was imitating. It does it

admirably, only the size of the throat reduces the cry till it is as like the cry of a gull as anything can be. There is a peacock across the river, and when that begins, I recognise the thrush's imi-



ROOK AND BLACKBIRD

tation of the cry. It is the loudest thrush I ever heard.

The young robins and their mother have gone away, and old Bob comes in and out again.

The blackbirds are very tame here. One was

feeding its young yesterday in the garden, and soon after I heard its alarm cry. On looking out there was a large crow of some kind sitting on the wall, looking out for young birds. So I clapped my hands loudly, and away went the crow, but the blackbird—close to it—moved not an inch. It watched the enemy well away, and then looked round gratefully at me—or so I thought.

That same bird sprang its rattle the other day on the appearance of M.'s black cat, and went on rattling for, I should think, half an hour, just behind Topsy as she sat on the wall watching for young birds.

The tits have vanished away to the woods at last. Two pretty flycatchers are doing good service over the tops of the roses, twisting and turning after the butterflies in the most wonderful way.

September 2, 1891.

We have had—and lost—two little tame robins; so tame that they followed me about, and into the house, and would eat out of anyone's hand. I hope they may come back some time, but I do not think it is safe to make robins so tame.

February 2, 1892.

M. has left me her robin to feed; fortunately he had become used to my window-sill before, and

he feeds off my finger quite as confidently as from hers, and sings for a bit of bacon whenever he needs it for himself or his mate. She has it thrown to her—has, for months—but never will come up!

I have lost that dear little eloquent cole tit that had so much to say to me and that said it so plainly! My little hen has another mate, but we neither of us think much of him at present.

February 17, 1892.

Bob comes after a very timid hen that has been about here for months, but never grows more confident. She comes to the window, and utters a small 'peep!' but when I go she retreats to the edge of the verandah, and expects me to throw bits of bacon to her; and if there is a tit in the way she is sure to lose her bit; for she is slow, and has not the courage to dispute it. I think Bob feeds her.

May 4, 1892.

The little male cole tit has thrice eaten out of my hand lately, but 'timourously,' as Mrs. Halse remarked, and only after seeing the robin do it. These tits do not mean to leave me yet, I see. They become more and more delightful and hungry, and now it is a pretty sight to see the two come together, the hen coquettishly asking to be fed by the other, as if she were an infant, and

could not do it herself ! And the *empressement* and care with which the male chooses a nice little morsel, and puts it gently and tenderly into the open mouth of the little quivering, squeaking hen !

June 5, 1892.

I have only seen my robin once since my return ; he saw me from afar at the window, and flew up and took a piece of bacon graciously from my hand, by way of saying that I was not forgotten ; but he is feeding his young ones in M.'s garden, and she feeds him most constantly.

My tom-tit came next day and all day ; for, finding things quiet and the window open, instead of tapping as usual, he dropped in, looked carefully about, and then found the plate under the desk, and carried off a supply of bacon (to his family, I suppose), and kept on doing this all day. He made such a mess with the bacon that I was obliged to put the plate elsewhere.

The chorus of birds is almost too much ; the whitethroats especially are singing incessantly, and they overpower the blackcaps. One blackbird is continually on the lawn, feeding a young one that looks larger than himself.

June 13, 1892.

All the birds have forsaken me, except the very timid hen robin whom we named ' Spectacles.'

She is as shy as ever, but comes in and out continually to a plate of bacon placed on the easel or table for her, and she evidently looks to me to put it there, although she does not like me to look at her, or speak to her. So unlike most robins !

M.'s Bob, the mate, we think, of Specs, is as sociable as ever, and comes to her directly she calls him. He has only paid me one visit. I think that, as usual, he takes half the brood about with him, and she the other. They must have three or four children, to judge from the amount of food they take away.

September 9, 1892.

My robin has grown so splendid ; I see him sometimes sitting lost, apparently, in contemplation of his bosom. He trots upstairs now and then after Mrs. Halse, and comes constantly into the hall with me, and is quite affectionate. But an old robin tries to drive him away ; and he gets behind me in the garden when he hears the old one coming.

December 28, 1892.

It is seldom I am able to go into the garden, but if I do, there is Bobinette who rushes at me, flutters about me with unmistakable delight till I reach the sea-kale pots, where she takes her expectant stand till I come up, and sometimes even after, till I have to ask for my seat. She is well

fed at the back door, and rather despises my little bits of bacon : it is real affection on her part.

February 2, 1893.

How amorous the birds are becoming already ! I was amused with Tapping Tom just now. After tapping most importunately (as he does when his lady is there too) for food, when I put it out, instead of taking a bit or feeding, he settled on the near branch of the rose-tree, and, turning his back to me, began a quite peculiar little cry, looking about in the meantime for his lady, who appeared to have given him the slip. How the little head did twist and turn, to be sure ! All at once, down he came on the plate (heard her, no doubt) ; but not to eat ; off he went with a bit for her in his beak. M. says she often sees them feeding their ladies on her lawn now.

Where, O where can the line be drawn between the inherited and the acquired ? Here, for instance, is this blue tit, 'Tapping Tom.' He has *inherited* the knowledge that a certain call brings that which he wants in the shape of a mate ; he has also *acquired* the knowledge by experience that tapping at the window brings me and food. The first piece of knowledge will pass on to his progeny ; the second will not do so, I suppose ; but where can the line be drawn between the two kinds or bits of knowledge ? Only the

manner of the acquisition seems different—not the nature of it. And the experience of the effects of an impulsive cry was probably the root and origin of the instinct inherited in the former case. My belief is that our language began with the expression of *feelings*, as does that of the birds and beasts; that it went on to express warnings, demands, and commands. So does the language of birds, as to the expression of warnings and demands at all events.

February 9, 1893.

Four rooks have been busy on the limes opposite this morning; not, of course, with a view of building there; the branches are not forked enough, and there are plenty of elms about; but they like to take the long flexible lime-twigs for making their nests.

February 27, 1893.

Old Tom taps more than ever, especially when his wife is with him. I know by the sound whether she is there or not (generally, at all events); and it is pretty to see how he takes a little bit, and then makes way for her and encourages her to come. But they *never* eat together. It evidently is not etiquette amongst birds for the two to eat together; at least it seems so with tits and robins.

May 3, 1893.

I saw the other day in a paper by 'A Son of the Marshes,' an expression that was new to me. Speaking of the songs of the different birds then going on, he says, 'the yaffle yikes.' (Enter Robin fluttering round my head with a large piece of bacon in his beak, startled by something outside, I think.) To 'yike' is Norfolk, I suppose; did you ever hear it? *We* used to call its very peculiar cry 'laughing'—a very appropriate name for it. The yaffle used to be much more common here than it is now; I have seen three feeding together on my lawn in the very early morning, eating ants.

A pair of nuthatches used to come constantly at one time, and brought a young one sometimes. But I do not encourage them now, for I find that the smaller birds are afraid of their large strong beaks and rough ways. Sometimes a nuthatch looks very funny from the window, hanging upside-down on the edge of the verandah, its tail pointing skywards: one wonders what it is. There is a squat reptilian look about the bird that one does not like; nor does one quite like its relation to the butcher-bird.

September 10, 1893.

Bobinette came down to my feet to-day, but a male Bob was singing loudly, and came down

to her and distracted her attention. One or the other—or another—has been warbling a whispered song deliciously in the rose hedge at dinner-time lately ; twice it has done it, two days following. I watched the creature quite close, but it turned its back, and shook its wings and went on, so I saw that the delicate attention was not intended for me. There seem to be many robins about, coming out into bloom and song. Perhaps we shall have nests and eggs and young birds at Christmas : such things have been here.

October 5, 1893.

Bobinette misses me in the garden, I hope ; the last time I went there she was sitting waiting for me on the sea-kale pot. She did not at first take kindly to a new coloured dress, but after wandering suspiciously about the skirt, she jumped up in the gooseberry bush, and stared hard at me as if to say, ‘I must learn well the part of her that does not change.’ Really that bird’s face was a study. Instead of the usual arch side-long glance, it stared and squinted and blinked ; and at last I believe it ‘wunk,’ as the Americans say (don’t you think we had better adopt some of their strong preterites ?) I am sure it wunk. Since then it does not seem to mind what I wear, and is very dear and affectionate.

TO MOTHER EARTH

My Mother Earth, what will you make of me?
When on my tired bones your weight is laid,
What will you make of me, O Mother Earth?

Make not a rose—I was not beautiful;
Nor yet a violet—none called me sweet;
Let no forget-me-nots, with earnest eyes,
Make vain appeals to dulling memories;
And bid no yew nor cypress fling its shade
Upon my grave, for weary I shall be,
And glad to rest; nor yet victorious bay;
For, Mother Earth, there is not much of me,
And when I sang none listened. Listen now,
O skilful Mother!—listen to me now,
And I will tell you what to make of me:
The purple heath that clothes the lonely hills,
The purple heath shall flourish from my bones.

For once, long years ago, one summer day
My mother and her friends together met
To celebrate a birthday festival;
And whilst their children sported in the sun
They talked the flower-language in the shade,
Then set themselves, making speech visible,
To crown each childish head with fitting wreath.
So one was decked with hospitable oak,
Mixed with the brilliant gladness of the broom;
With myrtle one, and one with passion-flowers:

One wore the rose, and one the jessamine,
And one the mignonette and pansy-flower.
But I was crowned with solitary heath,
And midst the purple bunches there was set
(‘That’s for simplicity,’ our mother said)—
The single rose, thornless and evergreen,
The white Leonida.

The warm day passed,
And all the wreaths lay dead save mine alone,
Which flourished still—a night-sky set with stars
For though the petals fell, the shining leaves
And golden stamens of the roses stayed.
Upon an ancient mirror it was hung,
And there remained for many and many a day,
And then it vanished—whither, who can tell?

For me, I think it passed into my life,
And crowns it still ; for, single and alone,
I’ve trod a thornless path and colourless ;
Dreaming of beauty on the purple hills,
And listening to the music of the winds.
Therefore, O Mother, make a patch of heath
Of my old bones, a patch of purple heath ;
Not large, obtrusive ; let the grass grow too—
For, Mother Earth, there is not much of me.

August 27, 1882.

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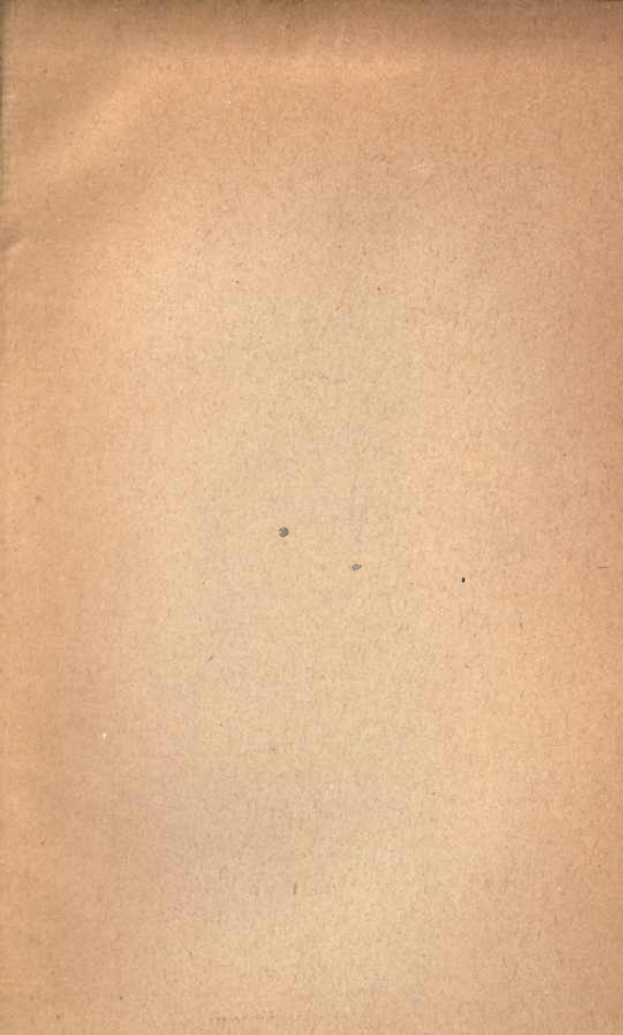
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